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Understanding Russia
A Cultural History

Course Guidebook

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Dr. Hartnett's work, which has been published in a number of academic journals, focuses on the Russian revolutionary leader Vera Figner and the terrorist group People's Will; Russian political émigrés in European exile; the Russian civil war as experienced by an individual family; and the transnational activist networks that Russian émigrés built with British liberals, socialists, and suffragists. Immigration policy and refugee issues are central to this work and provide a link to contemporary policy questions. Dr. Hartnett is also the author of the book *The Defiant Life of Vera Figner: Surviving the Russian Revolution.*

Dr. Hartnett is the director of Villanova's graduate program in History, and the president of the Sigma of Pennsylvania Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. At Villanova, she has served as the director of the Russian Area Studies Program. Dr. Hartnett has been nominated three times for the Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Distinguished Teaching Award and has received several teaching awards at both Villanova and Boston College. ■

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UNDERSTANDING RUSSIA

A CULTURAL HISTORY

This course on Russian cultural history embarks on an effort to better understand the empire of land and spirit arrayed from Europe to Asia and from the Baltics to the Pacific. To do so, it focuses on the country's intellectuals—that is, its poets, novelists, artists, composers, leaders, clerics, and revolutionaries. The lectures will define—and sometimes redefine—a Russian identity through culture.

This course's quest stretches from Kremlin cathedrals to the palaces of St. Petersburg, from the chants of the Russian Orthodox Church to the soaring musical compositions of Peter Tchaikovsky, and from the folklore and fairytales of the medieval age to the romantic poetry of Alexander Pushkin and the realism of Leo Tolstoy.

The course looks deeply into the recesses of the Russian mind, from holy medieval icons to the expressive 19th-century paintings of Ilya Repin, from the comedic plays of Anton Chekhov to grueling memoirs from the Soviet gulags, and from the ceremony and majesty of the Romanov autocracy to the Russian baths and daily rituals of the Russian village.

Key figures in the course include the 16th-century Russian ruler Ivan the Terrible, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Peter the Great, among many others. The course also looks at Lenin and Stalin through the lens of their cults of personality and the imposition of a Soviet rather than historically Russian character on the people. In later lectures, the course enters the shared public spaces of the immediate post-Soviet period and the faceless flats constructed by Nikita Khrushchev.

In sum, the course seeks to answer the same question asked by Russians throughout history: What does it mean to be Russian? The answer is multifaceted, fascinating, and continually changing. ■



LECTURE 1

A RUSSIAN PAST, THE PUTIN FUTURE

From the earliest recorded history of the Russian state in the 9th century, its own countrymen have sought to understand what it meant to be Russian, and to find a source of unity, stability, and legitimacy through shared identity, history, and culture. This lecture introduces some background information and themes that will shed light on that quest and be useful throughout the rest of the course.

Background on Russia

At certain points in history, the Russian empire has encompassed up to one-sixth of the world's landmass. Even today, Russia extends across 11 time zones. Resting on two continents like a massive geographical overlord, the country dominates Eurasia.

Russia has been more than a country. It was, and perhaps still, is an empire. A desire for power—masked by a grand civilizing mission—propelled Russia to expand outward from its imperial capital from the 15th century through the 20th century much like the European colonial powers of 19th and 20th centuries.

Russia drove north to the Arctic Circle, westward into present-day Poland and the Baltic states, southward into resource-rich areas along the Black Sea and Caspian Sea, and across desolate and sparsely inhabited Siberia to the Pacific coast. For a time, the Russian empire even extended across the Bering Straits into Canada, and down the Pacific Coast into what is now Northern California. The Russian political system and its autocracy facilitated this growth. The Russian ruler, whoever it may have been at a given time, was the engine that drove the creation and maintenance of an empire.

The historian James Cracraft makes the point that imperialism and absolutism—that is, unlimited central authority—shaped Russian nationalism from inception. Russia developed as a state—and then as an empire—due to the territorial expansion led by its monarchs. The notion of Russianness could not be defined or enforced by a shared culture because one didn't exist in what was already a multiethnic, multi-confessional entity by the 16th century. The idea of Russianness depended on the common subjection of the people to the ruler of Russia. For a time, this was enough.

New Ideas

The notions of humanism and individuality that gripped much of Western Europe during the 15^{th}-century Renaissance didn't permeate the Russian border for centuries more. Not until the Enlightenment ideals of the 18^{th} century seeped into Russia—along with the effects of 19^{th}-century romanticism and nationalism—was an intellectual exploration undertaken internally to find a sense of Russian nationality beyond the autocrat. The effort to discover an organic Russian cultural identity spurred much of Russia's artistic achievements, though even this was conditioned by the influence of the autocracy over the previous centuries.

Moscow served as the capital of Russia from the 14^{th} century until the 18^{th} century. However, the determination of ruler Peter the Great to reorient his country toward Europe led him to move his capital to St. Petersburg in 1712. This prompted an enduring competition between Moscow and St. Petersburg for cultural and political supremacy. In St. Petersburg, Peter built a grand European capital from scratch. It became the point of entry and development for European culture.

However, to Russian artists, musicians, and intellectuals who struggled to find and depict their country's cultural essence, the two capitals represented the country's cultural schizophrenia. It was a tension between old Russia and new Russia.

Russia's Beginnings

The known beginnings of Russia stretch back more than a millennium to the land originally referred to as Rus'. Scholars face much uncertainty about the earliest settlements in this area, on Europe's northeastern edge. However, archeological research proves that it has been occupied since antiquity. Since the Middle Ages, it was likely populated by East Slavs, who engaged in agriculture and trade.

From a surviving 12^{th}-century source called the *Primary Chronicle*—which is a history of not only the East Slavs but also of the organized state they became a part of—the picture becomes a little clearer, beginning in the 9^{th} century. The East Slavs developed a significant trading network in spite of the challenges posed by the climate, soil, and raids from neighboring tribes.



RUSSIA'S GEOGRAPHY: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Russia's geography was long the basis of both its greatness and insecurity. Although Russia contains some of the world's largest reserves of natural gas, coal, and oil, until recently it was tremendously difficult to extract, transport, and monetize these resources. As a result, for much of its history, the Russian government and economy were unable to fully realize the financial and strategic benefits of the country's supply of natural resources.

Additionally, Russia's geography provided it with little natural protection against geopolitical foes. With no large mountain ranges or vast oceans separating Russia from its neighbors, potential enemies could easily sweep across the flatlands known as the Great Steppe that dominates the Eurasian region. A continued threat of invasion—as well as the reality of the Mongol, Napoleonic, and Nazi invasions—was a permanent shadow on the Russian identity.

By the middle of the 9th century, the region attracted the attention of Scandinavian merchant warriors, or Vikings, known as Varangians. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, the Slavic people grew tired of the internal and external disorders that thwarted their trade. They turned to a group of Varangians—known as Rus'—and asked for their guidance and protection. Within a generation, the organized state of Kievan Rus' was born.

Just over a century later, a Rurik prince named Vladimir looked to religion as a way to solidify the power of the Rus' and unite what was by then a growing and ethnically diverse empire. He also sought to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the great European powers. Vladimir is said to have auditioned several of the world's major religions. In the end, Vladimir ordered his people to convert to the Eastern version of Christianity or risk his displeasure.

Embracing the Eastern version of Christianity proved to have monumental cultural and religious repercussions once the Roman and Eastern churches irrevocably split in the year 1054. Vladimir's choice of Eastern Christianity meant that the Rus' would have limited cultural connections with Western Europe for centuries to come.



Mongol Invasions

For a time, the ruling Rurik princes were largely successful. This new country between Europe and Asia—and between Scandinavia and the Byzantine world—benefited from its location at a crossroads in international trade. Its princes patronized a rich culture that celebrated Christianity and royal grandeur.

However, in the 13th century, Rus' received a brutal reminder of its precarious political situation and the vulnerability that came with its geography. This was in the form of the largest nomadic force to cross the Great Steppe from Asia into Europe: the Mongol horde.

The Mongol horde made vassals out of the region's princes and forever altered the course of Russian history. The Mongols didn't actually occupy Russian territory. Instead, they found it expedient to leave the principalities more or less intact and to rule their dominions from a distance. From the Russian princes, they demanded vassalage and the payment of regular tribute.

The Rise of Moscow

The princes who ultimately benefited from the Mongol invasion were those in the Moscow area. Moscow first appears in the historical record as a minor town in 1147. Its princes—from a junior line of the Rurik dynasty called the Daniloviches—established a good relationship with the Mongol khans. Subsequently, they earned a monopoly on the right to collect tribute, or taxes, for the Mongols.

In this way, the Muscovite princes became first among Russian princes. The fortunes of the Muscovite princes rose just when those of the Mongols began to decline. Prince Dmitry of Moscow (1359–1389) consolidated his rule over neighboring rivals as succession crises were tearing at the heart of the Mongol empire.

Dmitry stopped making regular tribute payments to the Mongols. When the Mongols sent a force to Moscow to teach the upstart prince a lesson, Dmitry won a surprising victory in 1380. It was so momentous—and so unexpected—that Dmitry became a hero, and he was lionized as Dmitry Donskoi, in honor of his victory near the upper Don River.

Two years later, Mongol armies returned and sacked Moscow in retribution. Still, Dmitry's initial victory had broken the myth of Mongol invincibility. It furthered the powerful aura associated with the grand princes of Moscow.

Russian Independence

While the Rus' didn't find liberation from the Mongols in the 14th century, they would in the next. It would fall to an heir of Dmitry Donskoi to establish Russian independence. In 1480, Ivan III declared Russian sovereignty, and a new era began. With independence, Russia also found new purpose.



Ivan III

The Byzantine Empire had fallen to the Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1453. Russia was now the only independent Orthodox dominion in the world. This fed Ivan's sense of Russia having an imperial destiny and a holy mission. Over time, Ivan and his heirs increasingly believed that Russia was more than just a state. They believed it was a great Christian empire. They felt that Russia was stepping into the legacy left by the fallen empires of Rome and the Byzantines.

Just as Rome and Constantinople had each used its power and authority to spread culture and religion beyond their borders, Russia now felt that it had a similar mission and responsibility. In the words of one church official, there had been two Romes and both had fallen. Now, Moscow was the third Rome, and there would be no fourth.

By this point, Russia might not have fully discovered its cultural identity. However, it had found its apparent destiny at the hands of not just a grand prince, but a tsar.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Billington, *The Icon and the Axe.*

Cracraft, "*Empire versus Nation.*"

Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell.*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is it feasible to create a sense of unified national identity for a country as expansive and ethnically diverse as Russia?
2. How did the power of the prince and the power of religion reinforce each other and allow for the establishment of the Russian empire?
3. What is the relationship between cultural power and political power?



LECTURE 2

IVAN THE TERRIBLE'S 500-YEAR REIGN

This lecture focuses on the reign of Ivan the Terrible (also known as Ivan IV). His reign has become a cultural and historical symbol of Russian leadership, for better and worse.

Background

Russia's origins date back to Kievan Rus' in the 9th century. Mongol conquest in the 13th century disrupted the organization of the early Russian state. After Mongol armies sacked Kiev, a centralized, unified Russia didn't reemerge until the mid-15th century. It did so then under the leadership of Ivan IV's grandfather, who is deservedly known as Ivan the Great.

Ivan the Great solidified Moscow's rule over the former individual principalities of Appanage Russia. These sorts of mini-states ruled by individual princes flourished after the Mongol conquest. Ivan established his authority over these principalities, and, just as importantly, declared Russia's independence from the Mongols in 1480. He reclaimed Russia's sovereignty from the Mongols and affirmed his own sovereignty over other Russian princes.

After the Ottomans conquered Byzantium in 1453, Russia became the only sovereign Orthodox power of note. In the last years of his reign, Ivan called himself not just the grand prince of Russia, but also the sovereign and tsar.

Upon Ivan III's death in 1505, his eldest surviving son ascended the throne as Vasily III. That same year, Vasily married a young woman named Solomonia. In spite of hopes for a successful union between the young couple, it proved unsuccessful in the only way that mattered for a ruler: It failed to produce an heir. Vasily III was now determined to divorce his childless bride, even though the Orthodox Church forbade a man to divorce an innocent wife. In turn, Vasily accused Solomonia of witchcraft, and a church council granted the divorce. Solomonia was vanquished to a convent.

Vasily III

Already in his 40s, Vasily selected the 15-year-old Elena Glinskaya as his new bride. In August 1530, Elena gave birth to a baby boy, whom the royal couple named Ivan, after his much-celebrated paternal grandfather. When the new Ivan was only three, Vasily died. This left a toddler—and his mother—in charge of the country. In 1538, however, Elena died suddenly, and young Ivan was left an orphan.

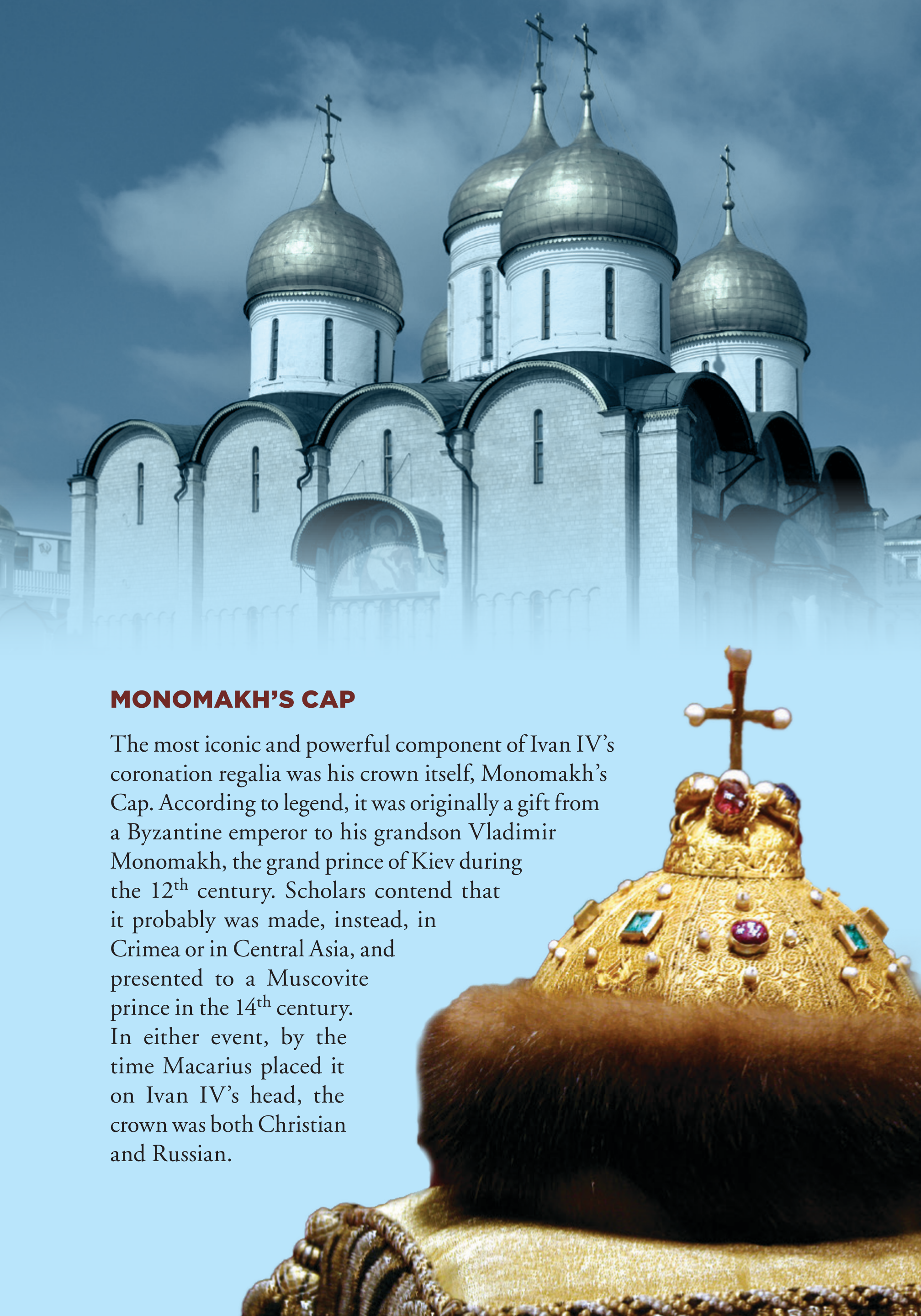
This was an especially scary time in Ivan's life. Many members of the royal court believed that Elena had been poisoned—and she most likely was. The young orphaned prince was surrounded by power-hungry boyars vying for control. His grandmother, Anna Glinskaya, and two maternal uncles gained the upper hand at court, but violent intrigue was a fact of Ivan's childhood.

Ivan developed a tendency for paranoia and an appreciation of violence. Several accounts contend that from childhood, Ivan passed many hours torturing birds and hurling animals to their deaths from high towers around the palace in the Kremlin. By the time he was 13, Ivan moved on to humans. He ordered a cousin and rival, Andrei Shuisky, to be killed.

Fear and Awe

Suspicions that Elena had been murdered demonstrated how lethal court intrigue and personal ambition could be. As he came of age, the prince and his advisors realized that Ivan needed to be fearsome if he was to maintain control. Some of the more astute men who served as Ivan's closest counselors realized that fear alone was not enough. Instead, men like Metropolitan Macarius—who was head of the Russian Orthodox Church from 1542 to 1563—were convinced that Ivan needed to arouse awe as well as fear.

Ivan's coronation at the Cathedral of the Dormition—built by his grandfather—was the ideal setting in which to publicly demonstrate this notion. Macarius now anointed Ivan and crowned him Grand Prince Ivan Vasilyevich—the God-crowned tsar of the whole of Russia. Although his grandfather before him had used the title of tsar after proclaiming Russia's independence from the Mongols in 1480, Ivan IV was the first Russian ruler to use the title consistently and the first to use it from the moment of his coronation.



MONOMAKH'S CAP

The most iconic and powerful component of Ivan IV's coronation regalia was his crown itself, Monomakh's Cap. According to legend, it was originally a gift from a Byzantine emperor to his grandson Vladimir Monomakh, the grand prince of Kiev during the 12th century. Scholars contend that it probably was made, instead, in Crimea or in Central Asia, and presented to a Muscovite prince in the 14th century. In either event, by the time Macarius placed it on Ivan IV's head, the crown was both Christian and Russian.

Military Reform

Military reform was a priority because of Ivan IV's territorial ambitions. When he took the throne, Russia was a landlocked power. In the north, the remnants of the order of Livonian knights blocked access to the Baltic. To the southwest, the vast Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth stemmed Russian ambitions. The last vestiges of the Mongol Golden Horde created instability on Russia's southern and eastern borders. Ivan IV resolved to change the balance of power with a reformed army.

Ivan turned his attention first to the khanate of Kazan. Conquering it would demonstrate the reversal of fortunes between the Russians and the Mongols and allow the Russians to control more of the Volga River—and move closer to the Caspian Sea. Ivan left Moscow in 1552 to begin this quest. His forces prevailed after intense fighting. On the way home, Ivan received the news that his wife, Anastasia had given birth to a son, Dmitrii.

Four years later, Ivan's forces took the city of Astrakhan to the south, on the banks of the Volga River, and established Russia's foothold on the Caspian Sea.



Ivan IV under the walls of Kazan by Pyotr Korovin

Absolute Authority

In 1553, Ivan fell gravely ill. With his survival in question, the tsar demanded that the leading boyars at court swear allegiance to his infant son. Some, fearing a regency led by Anastasia's relatives, resisted. The most influential courtiers eventually took the oath, and Ivan recovered his health, but the tsar remembered the boyars' reluctance. It fed his paranoia—and his determination to make his authority absolute.

In 1554, Anastasia gave birth to another son, this one named Ivan. In all, she had six children in a decade's time, but only two—Ivan and Fyodor—survived into adulthood. In 1560, after a year-long illness, Anastasia passed away. It isn't clear if she came to a natural or a nefarious end, but her untimely death reinvigorated Ivan's suspicions.

Ivan IV's Later Reign

Historians tend to break Ivan IV's reign into two parts. The first ends with the death of Anastasia and includes some of the more positive elements of Ivan's rule, including a series of reforms and the conquests of Kazan and Astrakhan. The second half focuses on the tsar's increasing psychological instability.

Three years later, Macarius also died. The year following, the priest Sylvester—who exerted a positive moral influence on the tsar—retired to a monastery. From this point on, Ivan indulged his instincts, fears, and desires. Indeed, as affectionate as Ivan had been for Anastasia, her death did not stop him from marrying six more times.

Ivan's inclination towards suspicion and paranoia was heightened in 1564 when his friend and valued military commander, Prince Andrei Kurbsky, defected to the Lithuanians during the contest for power in the Baltic. This pushed Ivan down a devastating path.

Just before the feast of St. Nicholas in 1564, Ivan left Moscow for his estate at Aleksandrovskaya Sloboda, accompanied by his second wife, two surviving sons, and close advisors. He ordered many boyars to accompany him, too, along with their wives and families. His subjects discovered the full import of this move in January 1565.

As the winter holidays were coming to a close, two letters arrived back in Moscow. They were addressed to the new metropolitan and the common people of the capital. In these missives, Ivan complained of treason and treachery among church officials and the boyars.

Ivan IV also announced that he was abdicating. The people begged Ivan to return. They feared that the boyars would bring ruin. The people's reaction demonstrates a tendency among Russian peasants and townsmen—right up to the 20th century—to believe in the tsar's fairness and goodness.

Ivan IV's Return

In agreeing to return to Moscow, Ivan IV demanded the authority to punish and execute suspected traitors, and all those who disobeyed him. He then announced that henceforth his kingdom would be divided into two.

One part became the tsar's personal property, which he called the *oprichnina*. The boyars who had lived in these territories were now executed or expelled from their lands. Ivan then brought in lower-ranking members of the gentry whose loyalties clearly lay with the tsar to populate the lands. This was a way for Ivan to demonstrate his power, reward men who proved their loyalty, and to punish anyone whom he deemed disloyal or a threat. Tens of thousands are believed to have died.

The remainder of the realm was deemed the *zemshchina*—a derivative of the word "land." Ivan declared that it was to be ruled "by the boyars as before." Ivan took a hands-off approach here. He showed interest in *zemshchina* affairs only when they seemed to boil over into the lands of the oprichnina.

Other Wars

Ivan, in an effort to expand Russian territory further into the Baltic region, was also at war with the Livonian knights and the forces of the combined Polish-Lithuanian state. Although Christian, these opponents weren't Orthodox. Many Russians saw the battles as being for faith as well as territory.

By 1569, neither war was going well. The prospect of failing against the so-called infidels seemed a betrayal of Russia's holy mission. Since neither Ivan nor the mission could be questioned, he became convinced treason must be to blame. The violence of his purge was about to widen.

Now, Ivan's wrath fell on the towns of Tver and Novgorod. Convinced that the cities were rife with treacherous plots against him, he undertook mass executions. Ivan's sadism reached a crescendo in the summer of 1570. On one day that July, Ivan and his executioners killed 116 victims in a variety of horrific ways, including beheadings and burnings.

Then, just as suddenly, the terror ended. Ivan terminated the oprichnina in 1572. He forbade discussion of its existence afterward. Like so many other aspects of Ivan's reign, the motives behind his decision lie muddled in history. Mostly likely, he believed his rivals had been vanquished.

Still, Ivan did not curb his violent ways. In 1581, he committed a murder that would have long-lasting consequences. The tsar quarreled with his oldest son Ivan Ivanovich, after rebuking his pregnant daughter-in-law over a superficial matter. In a fit of rage, Ivan hit his son with a metal staff and killed the heir to the throne. Until his own death in 1584, Ivan the Terrible became increasingly tyrannical and erratic.

Ivan IV's Legacy

The question remains: How can Ivan be both terrible and awesome? Part of the reason lies in translation. In Russia, Ivan IV is known as Ivan Groznyi. While the Russian term *groznyi* can mean terrible, a better translation is "fearsome," "threatening," or even "awesome." Ivan's unrivaled power and willingness to use violence was indeed something to be feared. The exercise of that power—especially when judged to be used for positive purposes—was awe-inspiring.

Russia fell into a period of civil war and foreign invasion within a generation of his passing. Known as the Time of Troubles, suffering and death far outpaced what had been experienced during Ivan's reign. Consequently, Russian longing grew for the stabilizing force and security rendered by a strong legitimate ruler—even one who wasn't afraid to use violence.



Ivan the Terrible by Klavdiy Lebedev, 1916

In time, Ivan IV's reign became romanticized. In popular culture, he earned a reputation as a friend of the common people and an enemy of the boyars. Today, the fact that Russians wax nostalgically for Ivan well into the 21st century speaks to the complicated and powerful legacy of this 16th-century ruler—and to the enduring roots of their cultural norms.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Bobrick, *Fearful Majesty*.

De Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible*.

Perrie, *The Image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian Folklore*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How important were cultural symbols, rituals, and monuments to Ivan IV's ability to rule Russia?

2. Was there a method to Ivan the Terrible's madness? Was there an alternative to his authoritarian tactics in 16th-century Russia?

3. To what extent did the reign of Ivan the Terrible set a precedent for Russia?



LECTURE 3

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

This lecture examines the relationship between the Russian state and church. The lecture also assesses how popular orthodoxy—religion as it was actually practiced by the Russian masses—occasionally challenged church institutions and how the Russian state responded in turn. Another point of focus is the extraordinary influence the Russian church had on Russian culture over the centuries.

Christianity's Arrival

Christianity came to Russia—as did so many things—from the top, by decree. In the 10th century, the very center of Russia—or Rus', as it was then called—was in Kiev, the capital of present-day Ukraine. Prince Vladimir of Kiev, who lived from about 956 to 1015, was looking for a way to legitimize his position and authority over a heterogeneous population. Establishing a common religion seemed the best way. Vladimir chose Eastern Orthodoxy and ordered his people to follow suit.



He organized a mass public baptism in the Dnieper River—telling his people that whomever didn't convert would feel his wrath. He then ordered all pagan idols that the people worshipped to be destroyed. In their place, Vladimir built wooden churches filled with icons of Christian saints. Over the next century, several Russian princes followed Vladimir's example.

RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS ICONS

In Russia, religious icons were painted on wood in colorful layers of paint. They depicted likenesses of a spiritual figure—most often Jesus and Mary, but also important saints and martyrs. In a society where few people could read, icons were accessible to both the literate and non-literate. The icons were also holy objects of veneration. Their purpose was to facilitate spiritual intercourse between the viewer and the figure depicted.

Because the original conversion from pagan belief to Christianity was ordered rather than inspired, pre-Christian belief systems didn't immediately disappear. Instead, Russians layered the directed Christian rituals and beliefs on top of the pre-Christian beliefs that they retained. The ensuing religious practice and belief is often referred to as *dvoeverie*, meaning "two faiths."

The Schism of 1054 precipitated a formal split between Pope Leo IX in the west and the patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, in the east. It prompted two different strains of both Christian religion and culture in Europe. Because of its original religious ties with Constantinople, Russia's church and culture remained more in keeping with that of Byzantium than with the states of Western Europe.

One of the most important customs the Russians took from the Byzantine example was the idea of symphonia, which refers to the sense that the church and state had a concordant relationship. These two institutions were supposed to work with each other. They were mutually dependent, and the stature of one reinforced the stature of the other.

Kiev was the secular and religious center of Rus' from the 10th century until 1240, when the Mongols sacked the city. Over the next few centuries, the population shifted to the northeast. The stature of Moscow rose as a consequence. Moscow's prominence was heightened by the close relations between Russian princes in the city and the Mongol khans.

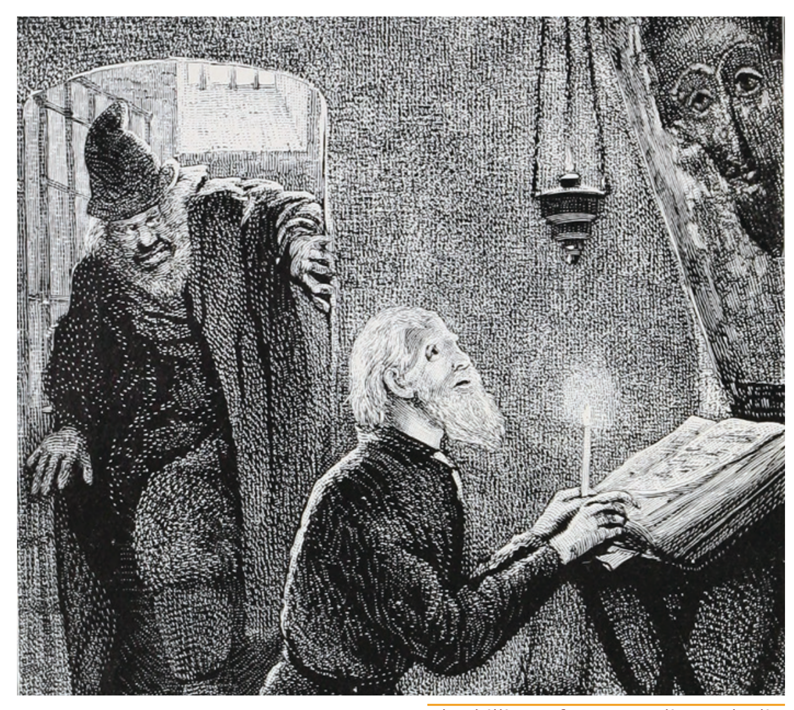
By the 15th century, it was clear that the center of secular and religious power in Russia lay in Moscow. Moscow's fortunes rose even more when Constantinople fell to the invading Ottoman Turks in 1453. Suddenly, Muscovite Russia was the only independent orthodox realm.

Ivan IV

The symphonia between Russian state and Russian church was fully on display at the coronation of Ivan IV in 1547. As Russia's first ruler to claim the title of tsar from the moment of his coronation, Ivan's investiture formalized this combination of spiritual and secular authority. From this time forward, the Russian tsar would appoint the church's metropolitan to his position, and it would be the metropolitan who proclaimed that the tsar's office was divine—and that his will was God's will.

In keeping with his spiritual duties, Ivan convened a church council in 1551 called the Hundred Chapters, or Stoglav. It was intended to serve a purpose similar to the councils of the Catholic Reformation in Western Europe. The Stoglav condemned religious abuses and stipulated proper practices. These included everything from directing priests to avoid drunkenness, to calling the shaving of beards a heretical bequest, to stipulating that the proper way to make the sign of the cross was with two fingers, instead of three as the Greeks did.

All seemed to be going smoothly until Tsar Ivan's early reforming spirit gave way to despotism. Between 1565 and 1572, Ivan directed a wicked policy known as the *oprichnina*, which initiated mass repression, public executions, and confiscation of the land holdings. At the height of this, in 1569, the symphonia concept endured a crippling blow. The metropolitan Philip—the head of the Russian Orthodox Church—publicly criticized the violence and injustice that Ivan had unleashed.



The killing of Metropolitan Pholip

In response, the tsar ordered Philip arrested and thrown into jail, where he had no possibility of defending himself. There, the *oprichniki*—or secret police—murdered him.

Boris Godunov

Ivan himself lived for 15 more years. After his death in 1584—and the extinction of the Rurik dynasty that Ivan had led—it fell to a new tsar, Boris Godunov, to restore the harmonious relationship between spiritual and secular realms.



Boris Godunov

Boris had tried previously to revive the stature of the Russian church leadership while still an advisor to Tsar Fyodor—the final Rurik leader. He did so by requesting that the patriarch elevate the Russian metropolitan to the position of Russian patriarch. Unlike the Roman church, which has one pope at its head, the Orthodox Church has several patriarchs.

The patriarch of Constantinople held the highest distinction, but there were also patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Given Russia's rising prestige as a political power, there was an impetus to have a Russian patriarch join the ranks. In 1589, when the patriarch of Constantinople was in Moscow, Boris detained him until he got his way. The metropolitan Job became the Russian patriarch. Once he did, the Russian Orthodox Church was, for all intents and purposes, an independent national church.

The country's elites now came to look at the non-Orthodox as heretical and potentially corruptive. The church—in partnership with the state—sought to limit the contact and interaction of its orthodox believers with those outside of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Resistance to Change

When it came to Orthodox religion, change seemed heretical. Resistance to it became pronounced in the 1650s and 1660s. Under Tsar Alexei and the Russian patriarch Nikon—who assumed this role in 1652—Russian liturgical books were revised to correct for adaptations that had been added to the original Byzantine texts over time. Church reformers also now stipulated that the sign of the cross needed to be made with three fingers instead of the Russian two, and that the triple alleluia, rather than the double alleluia, should be sung during the liturgy.



Alexei Romanov

Other changes involved the shape of the cross, the spelling of Jesus, and small changes in the wording of the Nicene Creed. These might seem like minor alterations, but they were jarring. The people found some essential rituals and rites that defined their belief suddenly proscribed. Many common Russians now revolted against what they believed were profane reforms.

Alexei exiled the most outspoken protesters. Then, church councils were convened to settle the issues in 1666 and 1667. They ruled that only the reformed liturgy was consistent with true orthodoxy. The use and practice of the old ways was declared heretical. This rupture between traditionalists and the reformers was known as the *Raskol*, or "Schism."

Many prominent clerics refused to conform to the new directives. But church and state authorities wouldn't tolerate such insolence. The resisters—called *Raskolniki*, or "Schismatics"—wound up being defrocked and imprisoned. Some of the most outspoken had their tongues cut out. Now, at last, it became clear that Tsar Alexei and his allies had decisive power over secular and spiritual matters alike. Symphonia could endure—but only on the tsar's terms.

The faithful who maintained pre-reform practices became known as Old Believers. To them, ritual was evidence of the divine, and couldn't change. They were willing to die rather than bend to the state's seemingly heretical stance.

When the tsar's forces came upon an Old Believer settlement to enforce the state religion, groups of militants would lock themselves in their wooden churches and set them ablaze. More than 20,000 Old Believers died in these communal immolations during the quarter century after the Raskol. Throughout the imperial period, they were one of the empire's most persecuted groups.



Nikon

Later Rulers


Peter I

The patriarch Adrian took the helm of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1690—eight years after young Peter I became tsar. Adrian expired just 10 years later. Peter himself wanted to secularize his state, believing that state interests outweighed clerical ones.

Peter was also preparing for what would become known as the Great Northern War with Sweden, which lasted from 1700 to 1721.

At the outset of this conflict, Peter started to siphon money from monastic estates to fund his forces. With Adrian dead, he was able to do so without much pushback. Instead of appointing a new cleric, Peter used the war as an excuse to keep the patriarchate empty.

After the war with Sweden led to a Russian victory, Peter turned to reorganizing the church administration in the same way he had already undertaken to reform much of the rest of Russia. To subordinate church interests to those of the state, Peter established the Holy Synod—a body of about a dozen clerics, overseen by a layman known as the procurator. It replaced the former patriarchate.

Peter effectively subordinated the church to the autocracy. From this point forward, it became nearly impossible to disentangle the church from the state in imperial Russia.

Some rulers, like Catherine the Great—who reigned from 1762 to 1796—would view the church as a useful institution to advance state interests. As part of her efforts to raise education levels in her country, Catherine expanded the number of seminaries in her empire, and worked to reform their curricula.

Then, in the 19th century, Russian emperors embraced orthodox identity as a cornerstone of nationalism founded on three pillars: Russian nationality, the autocracy, and orthodoxy. Alexander I (r. 1801–1825) and Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855) inaugurated efforts to form village schools in which the clergy would teach the masses religious fundamentals.

Nicholas I viewed this as an antidote to the unsettling phenomenon of liberal nationalism that emanated from popular impulses in much of Europe. This proved an effective, conservative strategy that temporarily kept revolution at bay. However, it also came at a cost. A definition of Russianness that coincided with orthodoxy fueled religious intolerance and prejudice. During the anti-Semitic reigns of Alexander III (r. 1881–1894) and Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917), this led to horrific repression and violence directed against the country's Jewish population.

Demands for Change

Eventually, demands for change proved too great. In the midst of the death, destruction, and governmental ineptitude caused by the First World War, Russia had the revolution the tsars had tried for a century to avoid. The symphonia that once reigned collapsed. At a critical moment early in the Revolution of 1917, even the Russian Orthodox Church refused to support Nicholas II. He abdicated the throne in March 1917.

When the smoke and dust cleared, the patriarchate was reestablished, and it looked like the Russian Orthodox Church would be an important institutional element within the new society.

However, in October 1917, the Marxist Bolsheviks swept into power. Marxist ideology expressed the anti-religious sentiments of its founder, Karl Marx. The Marxist-Leninist hybrid of Vladimir Lenin and the radical Bolsheviks was even more intense in its contempt for the church.

The traditional close collaboration between state and the church not only delegitimized Russian orthodoxy in the Bolsheviks' eyes; it legitimized a vicious campaign of religious persecution. Yet the Russian Orthodox faith endured.

When the Soviet Union finally collapsed in 1991, religious practice reassembled from the shadows. The sheer numbers of believers who came forth demonstrates that many Russians had retained their country's religious traditions and faith. In the post-Soviet period, the Russian Orthodox Church has enjoyed a dramatic renaissance—once again finding a certain symphonia with the Russian state.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Crummey, "The Orthodox Church and the Schism."

Freeze, "Russian Orthodoxy."

———, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did the symphonia between the Russian state and the church affect the development of Russian culture and the arts?
2. What were the links between Russia and Byzantium? How important is the notion of the third Rome theory?
3. What was the relationship between the organized Russian Orthodox Church and popular manifestations of religious belief?



LECTURE 4

PETER THE GREAT AND A EUROPEAN EMPIRE

This lecture explores the world that Russian ruler Peter the Great inherited and the new one he forged. It was Peter's fortune—as well as Russia's—for him to transform a minor power on the periphery of Europe into a formidable empire. In the process, he embraced European culture and decreed that his subjects make it theirs. These physical and cultural transformations were key to modernizing and westernizing Russia.

Background

Peter Alexeyevich Romanov was born in Moscow on May 30, 1672. He was his father's third son, this one from a second marriage to Natalia Naryshkina. Peter's two elder brothers—Fyodor and Ivan—stood between him and the throne. When the tsar died in 1676, it was the 14-year-old Fyodor who first succeeded him. Fyodor, however, passed away six years later.



Tsaritsa Nataly

The question became what to do about the next brother Ivan, who was 16, and mentally and physically disabled. After much conflict and controversy, the youngest heir, 10-year-old Peter, was appointed tsar. His mother Natalia and her family were to oversee his regency.

The appointment didn't sit well with the first wife's family. They had already seen their influence decline after the late Maria died, and Natalia took her place in 1671. Their fortunes temporarily revived with the Tsar Alexei's eldest son, Fyodor, in power. Now, with the support of Moscow's armed guards—the *streltsy*—the late Fyodor's eldest sister, Sophia, fomented a rebellion. She sought to place the infirm Ivan on the throne in Peter's place.


The Streltsy Uprising of 1698

During unrest, Peter's uncle, Ivan Naryshkin, and the family's closest advisor, Artamon Matveev, were murdered. The streltsy heaved the unfortunate family advisor over the side of the palace and impaled him on the soldiers' pikes in the square below. Given these events, it's no surprise that Peter would be disinclined to show the streltsy mercy, later in life.

A compromise solution was reached. The two surviving brothers would rule jointly, with Ivan V as the senior tsar and Peter I as the junior. Sophia, the eldest sister, was made regent. Over the next decade, the boys were figureheads under supervision. This was the first time in Russian history that the country had two rulers at the same time.

Peter's Early Activities

At the time, Peter lived away from the Kremlin (in the heart of Moscow), in a suburban village. He maintained an active ceremonial presence when need be, but he enjoyed more freedom than would have been possible living in the Kremlin.



Peter spent a great deal of his boyhood organizing friends into pseudo-military regiments that engaged in mock battles. Friends were formed into two principal regiments—the Preobrazhenskoe and Semenovskoe—named for the areas in the Moscow suburbs in which the young unconventional tsar and his friends lived. These regiments ultimately followed Peter to the Kremlin and served as his elite military guards.

By some accounts, Peter tended to have too much fun. To rein in his wilder tendencies, his mother Natalia arranged for Peter to marry in January 1689. This wedding—to Evdokia Lopukhina—was not a love match, but the pair did have their first child, Alexis, in 1690.

Meanwhile, the regent Sophia was initiating two military campaigns against the Turks. Both ended in failure, and Sophia's standing fell. In 1689, after the second unsuccessful campaign, Peter—now old enough to rule in his own stead—began to assert himself. Tension now rose between the pro-Peter and pro-regency factions.

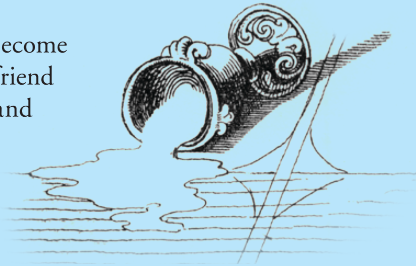
Peter Rules Alone

In August 1689, Peter was awoken in the middle of the night with the news that streltsy forces were on their way to kill him. There's some question as to whether this was fact or an invented emergency—arranged by Peter's supporters—to force a confrontation between the junior tsar and his older sister. Whatever the source of the provocation, Peter prevailed.

He continued to rule jointly with Ivan, but Sophia was now forced to retire to a convent and abandon her regency. Ivan lived for several more years, but in effect, Peter ruled alone from this point forward.

PETER THE PARTIER

After he began ruling alone, Peter did not become any more temperate in lifestyle. His rowdy friend group was frequently plied with alcohol, and mocked social and religious conventions. Peter enjoyed prolonged banquets, during which he delighted when friends and courtiers drank themselves into oblivion.



Among Peter's group of tight-knit friends was a youth named Alexander Menshikov. Over time, Peter increasingly relied on Menshikov, particularly as others close to him passed away. In 1694, Peter lost his mother Natalia. Two years later, Ivan died. Despite the family dramas, Peter maintained great affection for both his mother and his infirm brother.

Military Activities

During the reign of Peter's father, Mikhailovich Romanov, Russia had won some significant victories. A war with Poland in 1667 ended with Russia reclaiming part of present-day Ukraine—the area that extended eastward from the Dnieper River to the Russian border.

Expeditionary Russian forces traversed the wild expanse of Siberia and the Far East to reach the Pacific Ocean even before Peter was born. However, Sweden still blocked Russia's access to the Baltic Sea. To the south, the Ottoman Turks and Crimean Tatars stood in between Russia and the Black Sea.

Laying siege to Azov on the Sea of Azov was the first step in Peter's plan to gain warm-water ports for his country. Although an effort the previous year ended in failure, in 1696, Peter's forces captured the fortress. However, the Turks retained control of the Strait of Kerch, which prevented Russian ships from sailing from the Sea of Azov through the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. To gain access to navigable seas, Peter needed to seize the Strait of Kerch. The clearest path to do so was through the Ottoman Empire.

Although the Ottoman Turks weren't the formidable power they once were, Russia wasn't yet ready to engage them in a protracted battle for the sea. In order to accomplish his military objectives, Peter knew he needed help, so he left Russia in March 1697 to gather allies. Peter visited Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Dresden, and the Hapsburg capital of Vienna.

On his way to Venice in August of 1698, Peter received a stark reminder of the challenges that continued to be posed at home by reactionary forces. Word came that the streltsy was in revolt again. Peter had hated the streltsy ever since the uprising of 1682. Now, he returned to Russia posthaste and exacted his revenge: 1,162 streltsy were executed for their part in the latest rebellion, and another 600 were flogged and banished.

Peter's half-sister Sophia denied any role in the unpleasantness, although there is some evidence that letters had been passing between streltsy leaders and the Novodevichy convent where she was confined, prior to the revolt. Peter forced her to live as a nun, under a much stricter regimen than she had previously. To ensure that Sophia got the message, he had some of the corpses of the executed streltsy hung outside her window, lest she forget that she shouldn't cross her youngest brother.



The Morning of the Streltsy Execution

European Tinges

With his infirm brother Ivan now dead, Peter saw no need to retain the traditional Muscovite court. He went so far as to dispatch his wife Evdokia to a convent in Suzdal and took a new mistress. He also began to issue decrees. His court, and his country, were about to become much more European in both style and practice.

One of the first steps that Peter took was to change the calendar. Unlike the countries of Western Europe, Russians traditionally marked the start of the year on September 1 instead of January 1. In addition, instead of dating time from the birth of Christ, they numbered years from what they imagined having been the creation of the world. Peter overturned this practice with a 1699 decree that changed the calendar. It went into effect on what would have been January 1, 7208, and was now January 1, 1700.

Peter followed this with a series of other important decrees. He ordered all courtiers, officials, merchants, and townspeople—except for priests and deacons—to shave their beards or pay a beard tax. Though not anti-religious, Peter was determined to make his country more secular, and shaving beards was a first step. Next, and again on Peter's directive, Russian noblemen were directed to exchange their traditional dress for German-style clothing.

Women's fashions also changed by decree. In old Muscovite Russia, women wore loose, layered garments that revealed only their faces and hands. When Peter returned from Western Europe, he directed that women wear dresses with full skirts and tight, often low-cut bodices.

During his year abroad, Peter recruited foreign experts and scholars to return to Russia with him to educate and train his people. With this expertise, Peter founded the Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation. He also separated the main Russian press, the Moscow Printing House, from church control. He established the country's first newspaper, *Vedomosti*.

Even more profoundly, Peter transformed the alphabet from Old Church Slavonic to a more modern style. He established new printing presses and founded schools. Determined to build an efficient military and bureaucracy, Peter had new handbooks, textbooks, and treatises translated and published. In doing so, he disseminated a more civil form of the Russian language.

Back to War

As tsar, Peter also created the Russian navy from scratch. By the time Peter died, his navy had 48 major warships, along with hundreds of small craft and a force of almost 30,000 men. His recruitment of foreign specialists gave Peter the technical ability to build ships, but he still needed access to the sea.

In July 1700, Peter decided to shift his attention northward to find that access. He temporarily set aside his plans for war with the Turks to pursue a more formidable objective: access to the Baltic Sea. The only problem was that Sweden controlled the territory that Peter craved. Peter saw an opportunity in the fact that Sweden had a new, young king in Charles XII.



Initially, things didn't go well for Russia. However, in 1709, at the Battle of Poltava, the Russians scored a major victory and never looked back. As Swedish fortunes declined, Russia's rose. In the 1721 Treaty of Nystadt, Sweden ceded much of its Baltic territory to Russia, including Livonia and Estonia. The victory shifted the balance of power in Europe, as the Baltic became a Russian sea.

In addition to gaining a warm-water port on the Baltic, Peter established the new city of St. Petersburg, which he declared the country's capital in 1712. This new capital was purposefully designed in the European style. It signified Russia's westward focus and future as a European power.

Peter's victory in the Great Northern War also transformed Russia from a country into an empire. It cemented a process begun more than a century before under Ivan the Terrible. This transformed Peter himself into an emperor. The newly created Russian senate proclaimed that Peter had brought his people to a state of glory before the whole world. In recognition, they bestowed upon him the title Father of the Fatherland, All-Russian Emperor, Peter the Great.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Cracraft, "Empire versus Nation."

Hughes, "From Tsar to Emperor."

———, *Peter the Great.*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What was the basis for Peter the Great's greatness?
2. How important were the decrees that Peter promulgated dealing with culture? Is it feasible for cultural changes to be decreed from above?
3. How did Peter make Russia into a European empire?



LECTURE 5

RUSSIA'S NORTHERN WINDOW ON EUROPE

In St. Petersburg—the city that Peter the Great built—modern Russian culture was born. This new culture was not simply a European import. Rather, it was a synthesis of Russian and European elements that created a cosmopolitan metropolis on the shores of the Baltic Sea, in the far western corner of an increasingly formidable European empire. This lecture looks at the rise of St. Petersburg and its cultural impact.

Building St. Petersburg

Peter the Great ordered St. Petersburg to be built on the shores of the Gulf of Finland in the early 18th century. The land was uninhabited swampy wilderness. In 1703, Peter selected this boggy land as the site for a new fort he needed in his war against Sweden.

Typically, the date given for the founding of the city is May 16, 1703. On June 29, 1703, Peter was there. This was the Russian Orthodox Church feast day of the saints Peter and Paul. Peter dedicated a church built within the fort, and he proclaimed the settlement St. Petersburg in honor of his patron saint. The city was purposely and consciously designed by a ruler who saw the city as a testament to his country's potential.

Peter's fundamental mission was to create a new center of Russia, and a new European capital, that was to be everything that its predecessor, Moscow, wasn't. Peter had long hated Moscow and saw it as the capital of Russia's past. Moscow's legacy came as much from the Mongol khans—who claimed Muscovite princes as their vassals for two centuries—as it did European princes. Its attention was trained as much on Asia as on Europe. St. Petersburg would be very different from Moscow, beginning with its layout—and the design of its buildings—such that no church or religious structure would overshadow those of the state.

Envisioned as a European masterpiece, the new capital needed to be designed by European masters, and not be bound by centuries of Russian and Byzantine style and convention. Consequently, Peter enticed foreign architects, masons, sculptors, and painters with salaries that would have been unthinkable in their native countries.

DOMENICO TREZZINI AND JEAN-BAPTISTE ALEXANDRE LE BLOND

Peter's vision for St. Petersburg was implemented by the Swiss-Italian architect Domenico Trezzini. He laid out the city's streets and squares and designed such notable architectural landmarks as the Summer Palace.

Another architect, Jean-Baptiste Alexandre Le Blond, designed the Summer Palace's notable garden, which incorporated fountains, exotic trees, and statues.



Summer Palace

St. Petersburg's design itself reflects the priorities of Peter the Great and his successors. It celebrates imperial grandeur. It enshrines not the church but secular power and military triumph.

It also celebrates Peter's love of the sea. Peter the Great's new capital city was set amid seemingly endless stretches of water, yet he banned boat oars. His motivation was to force his people to learn how to sail. With volatile tides, weather, and wind, this was no easy feat.

Housing and Art

The nobles and the armies of servants and merchants that followed Peter to the new capital needed suitable housing. Some of them built mansions along the Nevsky Prospekt (the main street), as well as the Fontanka and Moika canals, which conformed to the architect Domenico Trezzini's original designs. Such symmetry and uniformity enhanced St. Petersburg's beauty.

In turn, Russian nobles hired European artists to paint murals, design mosaics, and produce portraits. There was no shortage of artists willing to trade the comforts of life in Paris, Amsterdam, or Florence for the exorbitant fees paid by Russia's rulers and aristocracy. In this way, the dissemination of European artistic culture in St. Petersburg and among Russia's elite was breathtakingly fast.

During the first few decades of the 18th century, almost all of the artists working in Russia were Europeans. This gradually changed as European masters trained Russian apprentices and as Russian students whom Peter had sent to Europe to study returned home.

One Russian artist to attain some renown during Peter's reign was Ivan Nikitin. A Moscow-born son of an Orthodox priest, Nikitin studied painting under a Dutch master in a Kremlin workshop before traveling to Italy, where he spent three years honing his craft. In St. Petersburg, Nikitin found commissions painting leading members of the imperial government and Russian nobility. Nikitin's portrait of the state chancellor—Count Gavriil Golovkin—can stand among the best European portraits in terms of its technical finesse and natural depiction.



Portrait of Count Gavriil Golovkin
by Ivan Nikitin

The Kunstkamera Museum

By the early 1720s, the architecture, art, clothing, manners, furnishings, and entertainments of St. Petersburg society all reflected the European culture of the age. This was the age of the Baroque, a period of drama, excess, and flamboyance. Peter the Great himself had a taste for the exotic and bizarre that was in keeping with a fundamental aspect of the Baroque age.

In 1718, Peter commanded his subjects to deliver odd specimens of nature to local officials for his Kunstkamera museum in St. Petersburg. The Kunstkamera was a museum of art and wonders. Peter enticed his people to visit with free admission and a free cup of coffee or shot of vodka.

Once inside, visitors encountered curiosities such as an embalmed eight-legged lamb, conjoined twins, and a baby with its eyes under its nose. Also on display was the body of Peter's beloved dog Lizetka, who, in life had been the emperor's constant companion, even affixing her paw print to official documents. This museum was Peter's attempt to bring the knowledge of the world, as eclectic as it might have been, to the larger public.



Kunstkamera

Education

Peter also founded the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences to nourish Russia's best minds.

Initially staffed with foreign scholars, the academy soon produced its own constellation of Russian intellectuals, scientists, writers, and artists. By the end of the 18th century, St. Petersburg claimed nearly 50 schools and almost 7,000 students.

One of the Academy of Sciences' most outstanding minds belonged to Mikhail Lomonosov. He became the Academy of Sciences' first Russian-born professor of chemistry. He made significant advances in several fields of science. His enduring renown stems from the amazing breadth of his intellectual talents. He wrote one of the first Russian grammars, completed several historical works, and was an accomplished poet.

After Peter

Peter died in 1725, and for a time afterward, it looked as if his cultural revolution might be overturned. Peter's law on the imperial succession, which he issued in 1722 as a way to safeguard his legacy by selecting his successor, actually initiated a period in Russian history in which factions and coups trumped divine right in seating and unseating Russia's emperors and empresses. Peter's wife Catherine briefly succeeded him until her death in 1727.

Peter's young grandson, by his deceased son Alexei, then came to the throne as Peter II upon Catherine I's death. He moved the capital back to Moscow from St. Petersburg, and Peter the Great's Europeanizing efforts seemed in jeopardy. However, Peter II's death from smallpox in 1730 allowed his successor, Empress Anna, the daughter of Peter the Great's half-brother Ivan V, to restore the court to St. Petersburg.



Peter II

None of these short-lived successors left a lasting impact on Peter the Great's new Russia. Instead, it was Peter and Catherine's daughter Elizabeth who strongly revived her father's legacy upon becoming empress herself. If Peter the Great had made Russia a European-oriented military power, Elizabeth oversaw its development as a cultural power.

The Elizabethan Age

The Russian Elizabethan Age (1741–1761) was a period of extravagance, frivolity, ornamentation, and color. European artists flocked to St. Petersburg, attracted by its cultural energy—and the empress's deep pockets. Italian tenors and male sopranos arrived in droves. Opera became a favorite pastime of the Russian aristocracy as a result.



Elizabeth

By the mid-18th century, Russians of various social positions could see more than 50 original Russian plays as well as European staples in translation. In 1756, a public theater opened in St. Petersburg that offered free admission, though its patrons sat according to rank.

Elizabeth also loved dancing. During her reign, the Russian ballet became a fixed and respected institution. She also hosted elaborate balls on a regular basis. Her affinity for resplendent dress and clothing set an elevated standard for the Russian aristocracy. Even dining became an elaborate affair, replete with specialties brought from around Europe.

Aristocratic Russians' taste for Western fashions and furnishings also increased the demand for secular art in St. Petersburg. Elizabeth and her advisor, Count Ivan Shuvalov, founded the Academy of Arts in 1757, in part to satisfy this demand. The academy taught painting, sculpture, printmaking, and architectural design to a few dozen Russian students a year.



ELIZABETHAN ROCOCO

There's no greater manifestation of Elizabeth's implantation of Europe—and its subsequent fusion in St. Petersburg—than the Rococo designs of the French-born architect of Italian descent, Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli. He adapted the European baroque to fit Elizabeth's personality, as well as the spirit of her court and the legacy of old Russia.

In doing so, he created a unique style: Elizabethan Rococo. Among the buildings that define it in and around St. Petersburg are the Winter Palace, the Smolny Convent, the Peterhof Palace, and the Catherine Palace.

For Elizabeth and most of the other Russian emperors and empresses in the 18th century, transforming St. Petersburg into a world capital beyond compare was necessary to demonstrate the country's political might. However, it was also about sparking a cultural revolution.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Figes, *Natasha's Dance*.

Hughes, "Russian Culture in the Eighteenth Century."

Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did the design of St. Petersburg reflect the priorities of Peter the Great and his successors?
2. What were the primary cultural developments in St. Petersburg in the 18th century?
3. Would cultural westernization have been possible if the capital and the imperial court had remained in Moscow?



LECTURE 6

NOBILITY, THE TSAR, AND THE PEASANT

The lives of Russia's hereditary nobility provide great insight into the wider phenomenon of Russian cultural and political history. The rituals, tastes, experiences, and priorities of Russia's privileged caste guided the country's development. Furthermore, the political alliance from 1613 to 1917 that the Russian nobility forged with the ruling Romanov regime facilitated Russian expansion and development. However, it also came at a tremendous cost to the Russian masses.

Background

Unlike English lords, Russian nobles didn't have much in the way of formal institutions—akin to the British Parliament or the legacy of the Magna Carta—to aid their efforts to define and defend a set of coherent interests. They had no traditional rights from which to claim political power. Instead, their privileges came through an alliance with the tsarist state.

The rulers of Russia increased their territory and their individual power over the centuries. Abetted by the Russian nobility, Russian rulers went from being princes—at most, first among equals—to tsars, and then to emperors.

The older medieval princely families cast their lot with the Romanovs' predecessor, the Danilovich branch of the Rurik dynasty, around the 15th century. In exchange for recognizing his authority, Ivan III—who ruled from 1462 until 1505 as Ivan the Great—granted these men sizable lands and estates from newly conquered territory in addition to the lands they already controlled. He then enlisted them as advisors or councilors.

With wealth and political power concentrated in Moscow—in a centralized state—Ivan became their tsar, and they became his boyars, or nobility. Before Ivan's reign, there had been only about 40 boyar families. By the time Ivan died in 1505, the number of boyars had quintupled to more than 200. And by this point, Ivan was not just a grand prince—a first among equals—but the sovereign, or tsar.



Ivan III

The opportunity for a boyar to advance his position through a relationship with the tsar was especially important because of the traditional practice of dividing one's estate among heirs—the practice known as partible inheritance. Allocating one's estate among all male children and siblings was intended to maintain the vitality of the extended family and noble line. However, it weakened the aristocratic elite. The competition for land and power among brothers, cousins, and other relatives could be fierce, amid a continuing diffusion of resources.

One attempt to mitigate these potential feuds was through the system of *mestnichestvo*, which was early Russia's mechanism for protecting the order of precedence. Mestnichestvo ranked boyar families and their individual members. It was intended to preserve privilege and reduce the potential of civil war.

Mestnichestvo determined what positions a boyar could hold in the tsar's councils and within the military. It stipulated that they could serve only under boyars of a higher rank and never serve under anyone whom they outranked. The only way that a boyar family could circumvent mestnichestvo was through marriage.



Marriage

All marriages in Muscovite Russia carried political weight. The most important was the tsar's choice of a wife. Boyar clans with a daughter who married the tsar hit the jackpot. As royal in-laws, they quickly became ensconced in the highest ranks of the court and circumvented mestnichestvo in a manner that was otherwise impossible.

Beginning in the 18th century, Russian tsars typically married foreign princesses. However, after Ivan the Great married a Byzantine princess in the 15th century, his successors all the way through the 17th century preferred domestic brides. Russian rulers at the time believed that the best way to minimize violent power struggles was to select a wife who was a relative outsider—typically, a daughter of a minor boyar.



MUSCOVITE BANQUETS

Most boyars of high rank lived in or around the Kremlin. Ceremonial banquets at the Kremlin were boisterous affairs. Outfitted in rich golden garments, as many as 200 boyars would sit down at long tables lined with tablecloths, where they were served boiled meats, vegetables, garlic, and onions out of large golden dishes. The only cutlery consisted of spoons and the knives that the boyars might have brought with them. For the most part, they used their fingers to eat.

Ivan IV's Measures

The boyars could be ruthless in their machinations at court. After Ivan IV was orphaned at the age of eight, turmoil engulfed him, as one boyar clan sought influence at the bloody expense of another. In 1555, Ivan reminded the boyar clans of the hierarchical nature of the tsarist state by instituting what was known as the Code of Service.

This law decreed that all estate owners across Russia had to provide one fully equipped cavalryman for every 400 acres of land they owned. Even before this decree, some noble lands already had service requirements attached to them.

The new Code of Service made all landownership conditional. This advanced the principle of autocratic rule, for now the clan's very status as boyars was dependent upon the favor of the tsar. Soon enough, this dependency led to a dramatic reversal in fortunes.

The Time of Troubles

In 1581, Ivan killed his eldest son and heir in a fit of rage. Three years later, Ivan himself died. This created the conditions for a period of uncertain succession, civil war, and foreign invasion. The period of unrest—which lasted until the election of Mikhail Romanov as tsar in 1613—reached a crescendo from 1598 until 1613 in what is known as the Time of Troubles.

In the midst of this turmoil, peasants sought to take advantage of an option denied them for all but two weeks of the year. They left their lands to seek better opportunities elsewhere. As a result, fields lay fallow and boyar incomes plummeted.

In 1598, the boyars turned to the newly appointed Tsar Boris Godunov for help. He reintroduced a policy first used sporadically by Ivan IV called Forbidden Years. In an effort to maintain political control and economic stability, the new tsar banned peasant migration, even during the harvest festival period and St. George's autumn holiday in November—the only time in which peasants had been permitted to leave their estates.

Citing extenuating circumstances, the tsar proclaimed certain years to be forbidden years for any peasant movement. In doing so, he basically tied the peasants to their boyar's estate during those years. This proved an immense financial benefit to the boyars and secured Boris their goodwill, albeit at the peasants' expense.

When Boris Godunov died in 1605, new competitors for the Russian throne emerged, including ambitious boyars, foreign kings, and even men pretending to be the long dead son of Ivan IV. A state of anarchy gripped the country. It settled only after a grassroots military campaign vanquished the foreign invaders, and an assembly of Russian subjects selected Mikhail Romanov—the great nephew of the late Ivan's wife Anastasia Romanovna—to rule as tsar.

The Romanov Dynasty

Still, peasant flight grew exponentially. The noble landowners' financial position dipped with each peasant worker who fled. After political stability returned with the selection of the Romanov dynasty, the landowners now appealed to the new ruler for help.



Mikhail Romanov

At first, Mikhail extended the time limits under which runaway peasants could be found and returned. This proved insufficient. In 1649, under his successor Alexei—and a new law code called the *ulozhenie*—peasants were permanently bound to the noble estate in a relationship that was made permanent and cross-generational. In this way, a formal system of serfdom was instituted.

For the next two centuries, the Romanov autocracy's alliance with serf-owning nobility became an effective mechanism for mobilizing resources in the Russian state. By the second half of the 17th century, as much as 85 percent of the Russian population were serfs.

Even so, the boyars began to see their political position weaken. Alexei Romanov regularly appointed new men to important posts at court and in the military instead of appointing the hereditary nobility. In this way, he created a font of royal patronage that was formalized during the brief reign of Alexei's successor, Tsar Fyodor, who abolished mestnichestvo in 1682.



Alexis of Russia the Quietest

Peter the Great

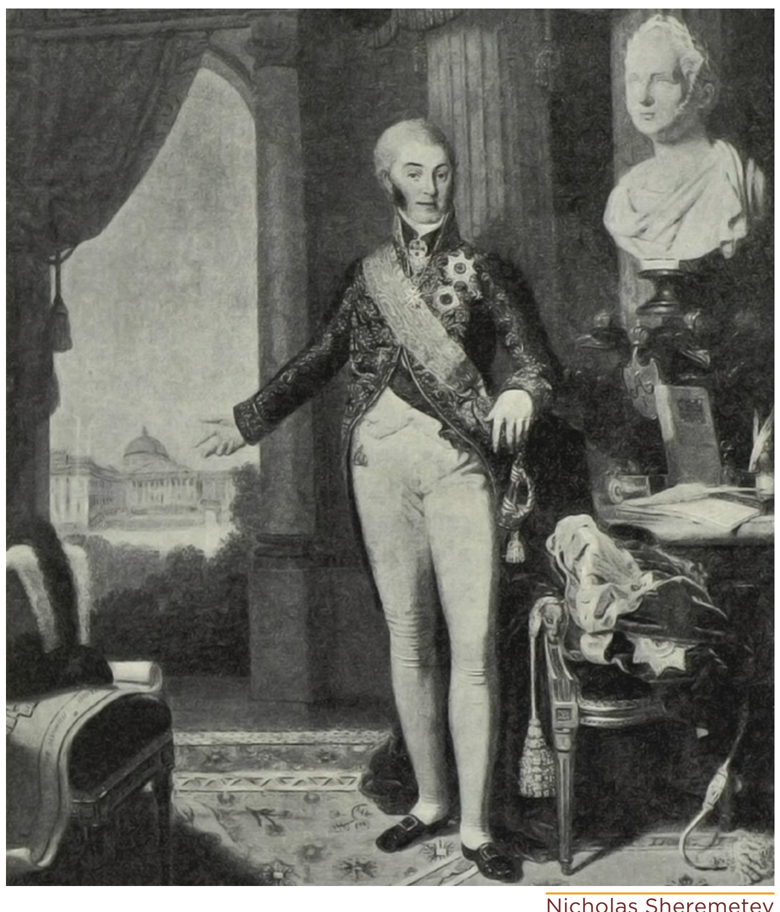
Tsar Peter the Great, who came to power in his own right in 1689, viewed transforming the boyar class as a fundamental part of his larger design. It was at this time that the boyars disappeared, and the Russian hereditary nobility became more akin to Western-style aristocracies.

Under Peter, when young noblemen turned 16, two-thirds of them were sent off to military service. The remaining one-third worked in the government. Peter also established a merit-based system for the military and civil service, which he called the Table of Ranks.

At the start of the 18th century, about 15,000 men enjoyed noble status. By the start of the 20th century, that number was up to 1.2 million people. Although this noble elite constituted only 1 percent of the population, it jealously guarded its gentry status and became increasingly class-conscious. In turn, the Romanovs passed legislation throughout the 18th century that confirmed the nobility as a property-owning class, with the exclusive right to own serfs.

One of the most remarkable examples of noble wealth is that of the Stroganov family, who became members of the Russian nobility in the 18th century, though they'd already been rich for centuries. Having made a fortune in trade, the Stroganovs funded expeditions across the Urals and into Siberia. The family became so wealthy via mining and furs that they often loaned money to various tsars.

The wealth of the Sheremetev family outpaced even that of the Stroganovs. By the end of the 18th century, Nicholas Sheremetev owned more than 200,000 serfs and 2 million acres of land.



Nicholas Sheremetev

Later Changes

The Russian nobility became better educated and more literate in the 18th century than ever before. In the first quarter of the century—between 1700 and 1725—100 times more printed material was produced in Russia than in the whole of the previous century.

However, as global markets expanded, Russian noble landowners found themselves borrowing increasingly large sums of money to maintain their lifestyles. An even greater challenge came at the middle of the 19th century, in the wake of a devastating loss in the Crimean War and an urgent need to modernize the economy.

In 1861, Tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom. He realized that Russia needed to modernize and industrialize. Still, it was an earth-shaking change that affected more than 22 million peasants. With the end of serfdom, the nobility lost their free labor source—and some of their land, which was reallocated to the recently freed serfs. Still, the state treasury compensated the nobles for land turned over to the peasants, and the alliance between the state and the gentry remained intact.

After the abolition of serfdom, the number of landless nobles increased dramatically. Many of them couldn't turn profits without a free labor source and sold their land to pay off debts. By 1905, only 30 percent of Russia's hereditary nobility still owned land. By this point, most nobles earned their income through military service or by working in the growing government bureaucracy.

Political Upheaval

Signs of a political earthquake to come emerged in 1905 and 1906. After tsarist troops fired on peacefully marching workers outside the Winter Palace in 1905, angry peasants torched noble estates throughout Russia. Approximately 2,000 noble estates were destroyed, as centuries of resentment percolated to the surface and as frustrated peasants unleashed their fury on local nobles.

Even though the tsars held autocratic power, the peasantry had long blamed the local landowners for their plight. In reality, it was the strategic alliance between the autocracy and the serf-owning nobility that was responsible for many of the peasants' disadvantages.

After the October Revolution of 1917, the new communist rulers had no use for the men and women whose families once had profited from the labor of others. Rather, the Bolshevik state now required the official registration of former landowners, capitalists, and members of affluent classes. Once registered, the Soviet government expropriated the former elites' property and required them to perform arduous work for miniscule rations. In the new workers' state of the Soviet Union, fortunes had dramatically changed.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Crummey, "The Boyars of Muscovy."

Kollmann, "The Façade of Autocracy."

———, "The Seclusion of Elite Muscovite Women."

Martin, *A Bride for the Tsar.*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Did the Russian nobility have any power in the tsarist state, or were they merely accessories in an effective autocratic regime?
2. How did the Russian nobility serve as conduits of culture?
3. What insights can we get about Russian society from the gender dynamics of the Russian nobility?



LECTURE 7

THE AUTHENTIC RUSSIA: POPULAR CULTURE

For centuries, Russian noble landowners essentially owned the common people under the feudal system of serfdom, in which peasants were bound to a hereditary plot of land and to the will of the estate's owner. In this way, a small minority of nobles had oversight over every aspect of their serfs' lives. In 1861, the Romanov tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom, but deep inequity remained in place. Still, the peasants produced a culture born of the countryside and of their experience. It was a culture rooted in religious devotion and the agricultural calendar. It was Russian popular culture.

A Culture Shift

In the mid-1600s, from a socioeconomic standpoint, the gulf between the Russian gentry and the common people was about as large as it could be. The cultural gap widened, beginning with the Eurocentric reign of Peter the Great, who ruled from 1682 until 1725. Peter, as part of a larger plan to Europeanize his Russian realm, decreed that Russian nobles should dress in European fashions and shave their beards.

Peter also built a new capital, St. Petersburg, near the Baltic Sea. He compelled many of his noble servitors to come live and work there. In the new capital, women wore wigs, corsets, and French gowns to balls. They danced to minuets and waltzes with Russian noblemen who wore silk stockings and lace jabots. Very little about these evenings resembled the Russia that Peter's nobles had known previously.



During the reigns of Empress Elizabeth (r. 1741–1761) and Empress Catherine II (r. 1762–1796), Russian elites developed a fondness for opera, the theater, and the ballet, as well. The heavy garlic, onion and sour cream laden meals that once filled the banquet halls of the Kremlin gave way to Western European delicacies. In the Russian countryside, though, peasants ate as they always had. Their priority was to nourish their bodies, not to amuse their palates.

For a time, the former capital of Moscow served as a sort of bridge between the traditional culture of the Russian countryside and the elite European culture of St. Petersburg. Moscow epitomized an older gentry culture. And the Muscovite elite prided themselves on their relaxed customs and hospitality. It seemed infinitely closer to its Slavic roots.



The French Influence

By the end of the 18th century, Russia had progressed from being a minor power on the periphery of Europe to a formidable empire of Europe itself. However, these gains came at a cost. The social and political upheaval associated with the French Revolution of the late 18th century—and the Russian victory over France to conclude the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century—contributed to a growing questioning of the national identity in Russia, in which its writers, artists, and thinkers sought to identify what made the Russian people unique. Russians felt the influence of a new movement, Romanticism, which sought to identify and celebrate the particular quality of a people.

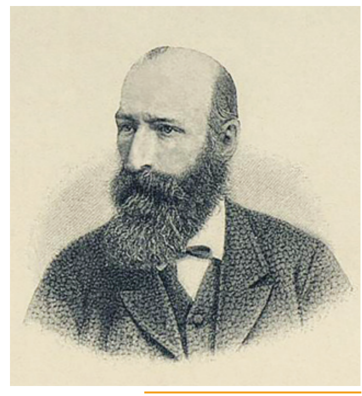
Now, after a century of emulating the French, Russian elites reconsidered their idealization of France. Among other things, the French Revolution had led to the terror campaign of the Jacobin leader Maximilien Robespierre and the execution of thousands at the hands of the Committee of Public Safety. That had led to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte and a French invasion of Russia. These violent and revolutionary developments gave many Russians pause. It seemed like an appropriate time to consider what made Russia unique and distinct.

The problem was that the Russian elite culture had slavishly imitated Western trends for so long that discerning what was truly Russian had become an elusive quest.



Russian Stories

One person interested in old Russian culture was the Russian anthologist Alexander Afanasev. Between 1855 and 1863, he published more than 600 traditional folk tales compiled from the archives of the Russian Geographical Society, where he was employed. The stories came from all over Russia, and had been circulating among the Russian peasantry for generations.



Alexander Afanasev

Superstitions and the supernatural play a big role in these stories. Characters fear the evil eye—that is, the hard gaze that the superstitious believe can cause material harm. The stories also accept the presence, and intervention, of the devil—a character who materializes to wreak havoc.

In a world that could be cruel and unforgiving, Russian peasants looked for ways to control their fates, whether through pious faith or superstitious habits. The more these superstitions were practiced, the more they became customs. Even today, many Russians are reticent to shake hands across a doorway's threshold. It was thought that since house spirits inhabited this space, they would exact revenge on anyone who dared pause there.

The masses, without formal education or much scientific knowledge, looked to explain their world through superstitions handed down through the generations. These are regularly reflected in Alexander Afanasev's folk tales.

Specific Themes

One recurring character in Afanasev's tales is Baba Yaga. She is the quintessential evil witch who has a penchant for eating children. Often, it takes the combined effort of clever children, loyal animals, and magical circumstances to derail her plans. However, in other stories, Baba Yaga is a more ambiguous figure. While still old and crotchety, she occasionally acts on behalf of the defenseless.


Baba Yaga

Animals with human characteristics and talking dolls serve as heroes in these stories as well. Desperate times call for help from any corner, after all. The tales are full of misfortune, beatings, violence, and even cannibalism, but often, justice prevails in the end. Frequently, it is the common man or woman who has the final word—or the last laugh—on an unjust noble who serves as the story's cruel, and cheating, villain.

Take, for example, the story "The Nobleman and the Peasant." A wealthy man robs a peasant of his goose. In turn, to exact revenge, the peasant dons several disguises. With each one, the poorer man is able to fool the nobleman, tie him up, and beat him to his heart's content. While delivering each blow, he cries vengefully, "Don't beat a peasant, don't take his gander." Through ingenuity—and perhaps a little magic—the peasant thus reverses the social order in tsarist Russia and finds the justice and revenge that the inequitable feudal system prevented.



In this way, we see how Russian folk tales offered consolation to an exploited people who found little justice in their own lives. However, if wicked noblemen function as foils in the stories that Afanasev collected, the tsar himself is not evil, though he may come across as clueless and a bit naïve. The Russian monarch's love proves the ultimate reward for a beautiful, clever, and often persecuted young girl. Many of these motifs come across in a fairy tale called "Vasilisa the Beautiful"—a story that bears remarkable similarity to the Cinderella tale.

This scenario of the redemptive tsar reflected belief in popular culture, as well. Although the Russian tsars decreed ever-more arduous conditions on the serfs, the Russian masses didn't blame him. Until the 20th century, Russian peasants tended to believe that if they could just reach the tsar and make him aware of their plight, he would right the wrongs in their lives and punish the nobility, whom they believed to be the real evildoers.

Another theme is apparent in the short story called "The Stubborn Wife." A peasant shaves his beard, and his wife refuses to acknowledge that he has done so. Instead, she insists that he has merely clipped it. The husband's anger increases until he drowns the wife in a river—but stubborn to the end, she pantomimes a pair of clipping scissors with two fingers.

This story reflects the highly patriarchal nature of Russian society. Women were supposed to obey their husbands to a fault and never contradict them. However, the stubborn wife in the folktale described refused to conform. Defying her husband certainly came with a lethal cost, but one might assume that it also brought great personal satisfaction to a woman who had been forced to live submissively for a lifetime.

STENKA RAZIN

A 17th-century Cossack named Stenka Razin led a major rebellion that vexed the tsarist state for four years, until he was captured and executed in 1671. After Razin's death, he "left a myth of rebellion," according to the late Queens College historian Paul Avrich, that "would inspire future generations with dreams of liberation." The early 19th-century poet Alexander Pushkin called Razin the "most poetic figure in Russian history." During the Soviet period in the 20th century, he reappeared in Russian stories and songs as a Robin Hood figure who was driven by the realm to right injustices imposed on the suffering people.



Resilient Practices

European culture and civilization remained largely confined to the upper classes and the main cities of Tsarist Russia. As the 19th century wore on, more and more of the educated elite idealized the countryside as the font of the real Russia, and real Russian culture.



Certain practices and traditions defined this culture. One that remains popular is the *banya*, or Russian bath. In the countryside, banyas were sites of important rituals associated with weddings and childbirth, among other occasions, for generations of Russians. In the cities, urban banyas continued to be extraordinarily popular through the Soviet period into the late 20th century.

Another steadfast cultural element is the consumption of vodka. Part of this reputation is deserved, and alcohol abuse stands as a veritable public health scourge in Russia, even today. However, the Russian pattern of drinking also fits into a larger cultural mold.

The religious calendar and sacred rituals determined the tenor of Russians' lives, no matter to what class they belonged. In addition to the major holidays like Easter, there were scores of sacred occasions when communal celebrations or fasting were proscribed.

During the latter, Russians abstained from certain foods and from alcohol. However, when the fast was broken, they indulged with gusto. At communal celebrations, holidays, and wedding banquets, toasts required guests to drink a glass of vodka in one shot continued ad nauseam.

Although a shot of vodka was thought to be salutary, this might have been counterproductive. However, the state had a monopoly on alcohol sales in Russia, and up to 25 percent of state revenues were generated from alcohol. There was some level of official motivation to maintain vodka's place in Russian popular culture.

Tea is another beverage often associated with Russian culture. The samovar is a quintessential vessel of Russian culture. These metal containers, or urns, are used to boil water and keep tea warm. Typically, they are heated with coal or charcoal. Tea and the samovar first became popular among Russian elites.



The poet Alexander Pushkin extended this custom to a wider Russian audience through his popular poetry and prose. In works like the classic novel *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin waxes on about the delights of tea and the simple pleasures of waiting for water to boil. Other Russian literary greats followed Pushkin's lead.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Afanasev, *Russian Fairy Tales*.

Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*.

Massie, *Land of the Firebird*.

Von Geldern and McReynolds, *Entertaining Tsarist Russia*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How real was the gulf between popular and elite culture in the pre-Soviet period of Russian history? Did this worsen once Peter the Great instituted his reforms?

2. What can we learn about popular attitudes and beliefs from Russian folk tales?

3. Why was there a new appreciation for popular culture in the 19th century? How did this affect the development of Russian art?



LECTURE 8

CATHERINE THE GREAT AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

This lecture explores the legacy of Catherine the Great (r. 1762–1796). She partitioned the kingdom of Poland, extending the Russian empire westward, and established Russian dominance in the southern regions—a feat even Peter the Great could not accomplish. Catherine's navy decimated that of the Ottoman Turks, and her armies secured Russian rights to the Black Sea. She also promoted Russian artists and presided over a golden age of Russian culture. In sum, she ruled for 34 years over the largest territorial political unit in modern history.

Early Life

Catherine was born on April 21, 1729, under the name of Princess Sophia of Anhalt Zerbst in Stettin, Prussia. That is part of present-day Poland. She was a minor princess. At age 14, she was selected to marry Peter III, the grandson and heir to the throne of Peter the Great.

On the eve of her wedding in 1749, Catherine sized up the match. She wrote: "My heart did not foresee great happiness; ambition alone sustained me. At the bottom of my soul I had something, I know not what, that never for a single moment let me doubt that sooner or later I would succeed in becoming the sovereign Empress of Russia in my own right."



Any affection that might originally have existed between the royal pair soon evaporated.

Peter III kept mistresses openly, and seemed to enjoy flaunting the fact to his young wife. Catherine had lovers as well.

Peter III's Rise and Fall

Empress Elizabeth died in December 1761. Her nephew, Peter III succeeded her as planned. It quickly became clear that Peter had no interest in endearing himself to his subjects. He withdrew Russia from the Seven Years' War, and he relinquished territory that the Russian army had only recently acquired.


Peter III

He planned a new campaign against Denmark to recoup some family territory, but he'd abandoned Russia's immediate war aims because of his tireless affection for Prussia and its impressive king Frederick II. To many Russian military officers and nobles, Peter's abandonment seemed almost treasonous.

Peter III embraced so many unpopular policies after his accession—and his personality was so generally disagreeable—that talk openly spread through St. Petersburg about plots to overthrow him. One of these plots came to fruition in the early morning of June 28, 1762. Catherine and her lover, Grigorii Orlov, decided to strike before the new tsar could dispose of his wife and marry his mistress, as he so often threatened.

Orlov and four brothers were themselves officers in the elite guards regiments. Ever since Peter the Great's death, the guards had often played a leading role in imperial politics. Replacing the unpopular Peter III with his more talented wife would be just the latest example of this trend.

The coup caught Peter by surprise, and came off without a hitch—except, that is, for Peter III's sudden death a few days later. The official cause of death was hemorrhoidal colic. The actual cause of death was Alexei Orlov, who finished Peter III off. Catherine later justified her accession with a full-scale indictment of Peter III.



Catherine portrayed herself as the rightful ruler in a long line of Russian tsars with a divine mission to rule. She demonstrated her political acumen. Even though Peter the Great had moved his capital to St. Petersburg, his successors continued to pay homage to history by holding their coronations in Moscow. Catherine did as well.

Catherine and the Enlightenment

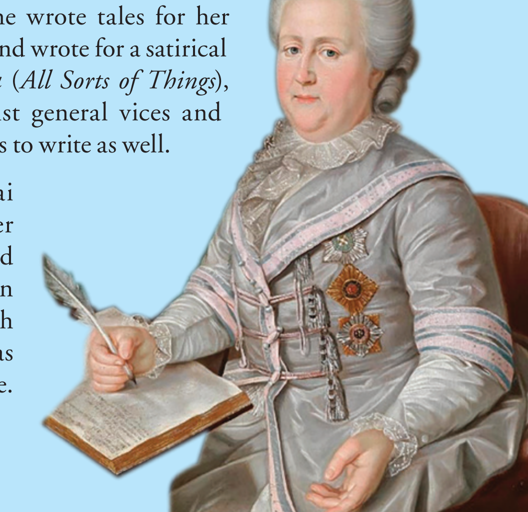
The principles of the 18th-century Enlightenment spread across France and much of Europe. They revolved around applying reason and rationality to the modern world. While monarchical power might today seem antithetical to much of Enlightenment thought—which stressed law and reason—to many 18th-century men and women, the monarchy itself seemed to be the ideal instrument for reform. Catherine the Great was among this number.

She promised that she would be a sensible, enlightened, and moderate sovereign dedicated to the greater glory and betterment of Russia. She formed hospitals and built schools. Like other enlightened monarchs of the age, she believed that a highly educated person with almost unlimited power was in the best position to bring enlightenment to the poor ignorant masses.

CATHERINE'S WRITINGS

Catherine the Great was a prolific writer. She wrote plays and librettos for operas. She wrote tales for her grandchildren. She even founded and wrote for a satirical journal called *Vsyakaya Vsyachina* (*All Sorts of Things*), which leveled gentle satire against general vices and deeds. Catherine encouraged others to write as well.

The Drone journal by Nikolai Novikov sprang up soon after Catherine's own journal, as did a host of others. Catherine even decreed that anyone could establish their own printing press—as long as he or she registered with local police.

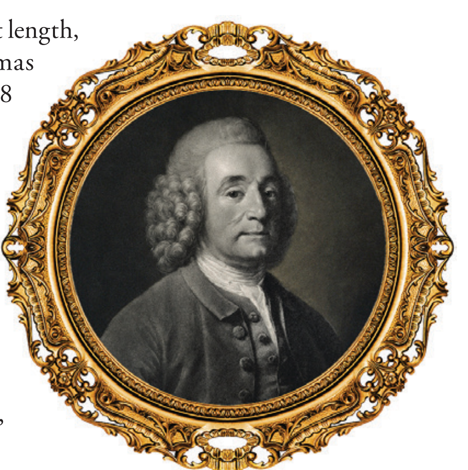


Catherine also expanded the system of learning throughout her empire and beyond. She subsidized the education of Russian scholars abroad, founded schools to train teachers, and established a secondary school in every provincial capital. Although religion remained in the curriculum, the focus was now on math, science, history, geography and languages.

Drawing on the model of girls' boarding schools in France, in 1764 Catherine established the Smolny Institute for Noble Girls at St. Petersburg. Smolny accepted noble girls as young as five years old. Here, they would live for years, isolated from the potentially corrupting influences of their families and estates. They were taught to be women of the 18th-century world, with knowledge of polite behavior, proper etiquette, and languages.

Catherine also took great interest in issues of health—and the potential of science to vanquish illness. During the 18th century, smallpox killed about 400,000 Europeans a year. A vaccine had been brought to Europe from the Ottoman Empire, but many Europeans balked at the prospect of purposely introducing the virus into their systems.

Catherine, after studying the issue at length, invited the English doctor Thomas Dimsdale to St. Petersburg in 1768 to inoculate her and her son, Paul. The procedure was done secretly, and Catherine made plans to get the foreign physician out of Russia, should she or her son fall ill. However, Catherine and Paul reacted well to the inoculation. Having tested the vaccine herself, Catherine now encouraged her subjects to follow suit. Many did, and countless lives were saved.



Thomas Dimsdale

Catherine and Law

A key part of Catherine's plan to bring greater order to her empire was to codify the chaotic laws of her realm. Catherine convened a legislative

commission in 1767. She recruited representatives from all of the free estates of the empire to Moscow to constitute this body. Although no serfs attended, a diverse body of Russia's other classes and ethnicities was represented.

To guide the commission, Catherine authored a several-hundred-page instructional called the *Nakaz*. This document borrowed heavily from Baron de Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, published some 20 years earlier. It had critically assessed different forms of political systems.

Catherine's *Nakaz* appeared to promise much in terms of reform. Her language denounced torture, criticized capital punishment, and censured the enslavement of "free" persons. It was provocative enough that censors banned the *Nakaz* in France.

However, the legislative commission failed to produce a new codification of laws. With conflicting viewpoints hampering progress, Catherine used the start of war with the Turks to terminate the proceeding. Even so, Catherine's admirers now sung her praise. The French writer Voltaire even specifically pointed to her rhetorical statement on torture while condemning the French state's reliance on the medieval practice.

Geopolitical Aspirations

Catherine pursued aggressive geopolitical aspirations. For instance, even though she had disapproved of her late husband abandoning Russia's military gains to Prussia, the two powers cooperated to keep Poland in check and to control events around the Baltic. On three different occasions, Russia and Prussia—twice joined by Austria—partitioned Polish territory between them. As a result, from the Third Partition until 1918, an independent Poland ceased to exist.

Catherine's slice of Poland expanded Russian territory to its west significantly. She also expanded the Russian empire to the south. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774, a decisive moment came at the Battle of Chesme in 1770, when half the Russian fleet surprised the Turks and effectively destroyed their navy. This—and the peace treaty at Kuchuk Kainardji—were turning points. From here on, Russia gained the ability to keep its warships on the Black Sea. Catherine later annexed Crimea and expanded Russian territory around the Black Sea.



CATHERINE AND ART

Catherine was so thrilled with the victory at Chesme that in 1770, she commissioned a painting of the conquest by the German landscape painter Jakob Philipp Hackert. Catherine wanted Hackert's painting to be as realistic as possible, so she arranged for the artist to witness the intentional explosion of a Russian ship to get a sense of what the battle must have been like.

When Hackert's completed work was delivered in 1772, Catherine displayed it at her personal art museum, next to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Over time, she collected a wide range of foreign masterpieces from artists and collectors throughout Europe. She purchased works by Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyke and Raphael. By the time of her death, her art collection included some 4,000 pieces.

Resistance

Catherine's extension of state authority as she expanded her empire aroused resistance. In 1773, a Cossack named Emilian Pugachev provoked a massive uprising in the Volga region. Presenting himself as Catherine's deposed husband Peter III, Pugachev gathered tens of thousands of men and vowed to end serfdom and the encroachment of the Russian state.



The uprising continued for more than a year, and led to the death of thousands of landlords and nobles. Once the war with the Turks settled, Catherine diverted her forces to put down the Pugachev uprising. Pugachev himself was captured, driven in a cage through the streets of Moscow, and beheaded.

A potentially greater threat emerged with the French Revolution of 1789. Catherine was horrified to learn that the French people would overthrow Louis XVI. She reacted harshly to the publication of a book called *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* in 1790. The author, Alexander Radishchev, described the immorality and irrationality of serfdom in his fictional travelogue. He also warned against a monarchy unrestrained by the rule of law.

This was too much for Catherine. She ordered Radishchev arrested, charged with sedition, and sentenced to death. Although the term was commuted to Siberian exile, Catherine's rage demonstrates the limits of her Enlightenment affectation.

Catherine's Legacy

Catherine the Great died in 1796, well before Russia would see its own revolution. With the regime change in France, the Russian empress lost much of her enthusiasm for social experimentation in the age of enlightenment.



She left behind a Russian empire that was infinitely grander and more powerful than the empire Peter the Great had inherited in the previous century. No Russian who lived during this time would have questioned the greatness of either Peter or his unlikely successor, Catherine—a foreign princess who had become Russia's greatest empress.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Catherine the Great, *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*.

De Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*.

Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is enlightened despotism an oxymoron, or can an autocratic state truly be an instrument of enlightened reforms?
2. How did Catherine the Great use art and culture to reinforce her standing, authority, and legitimacy?
3. Did Catherine's patronage of the arts affect Russian culture as a whole, or was it limited to a narrow circle of elites?



LECTURE 9

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN'S RUSSIA

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) is today recognized as Russia's greatest poet. Prolific beyond comparison, he wrote poems, verse, and novels. His life and art intersected with an amazing number of significant events, trends, and individuals.

Background

To understand Pushkin's poetry, and his literary significance, it's essential to understand the Russia he knew. Catherine the Great died in 1796, three years before Pushkin was born during the brief reign of Catherine's son Paul.

In 1801, a group of palace insiders overthrew Paul—killing him in the process—and installed his son Alexander on the throne. Alexander I (1801–1825) focused his rule on foreign affairs, largely due to the presence of France's Napoleon Bonaparte.

For the purposes of discussing Alexander Pushkin's work, the most notable event of Alexander I's reign was the repelling and eventually defeat of French commander Napoleon Bonaparte's Grand Armée. Napoleon invaded Russia with more than 600,000 men in 1812, but was repulsed in a long, bloody campaign that ended in 1814.





At the time of the Russian victory over France, Alexander Pushkin was now just an adolescent boy, not old enough to take part in the military confrontations between Russia and the Grand Armée. However, the literature that he would produce over his lifetime would reflect the conscious consideration of Russian national identity and pride empowered by the victory over Napoleon.

His coming of age would also coincide with a new conception of Russia's might, spirit, and destiny. Pushkin himself would begin to capture the spirit and language of the Russian people. However, he would also question a political system that had just brought Russia to its new pinnacle of geopolitical power.

Pushkin's Early Work

Pushkin spent three years developing the poem "Ruslan and Lyudmila," which appeared in 1820. It depicts a medieval Russian prince named Vladimir and his kidnapped daughter. It is filled with folk motifs. The action is driven by armed knights, brave princes, and wicked magicians—as was consistent with European epics. By fusing Russian folktale with the European mock-epic, Pushkin defied the parameters of conventional genre and national styles.

As soon as "Ruslan and Lyudmila" appeared, Pushkin's friends showered him with praise. Pushkin didn't have much time to relish these accolades, however. On the heels of the poem's publication, the tsar exiled Pushkin for his earlier, more political writing. These irreverent odes that he wrote in his youth had angered Alexander I so much that the tsar planned to exile him to an inhospitable, remote settlement in either the far north or Siberia.

Pushkin's reputation was so well established by now that influential friends were able to get him settled in the south. He would spend the next six years—until 1826—in what is today Bessarabia and Moldova, as well as Crimea and the Caucasus. Finally, he was exiled to his mother's family estate of Mikhaikovskoe in the province of Pskov, just east of Estonia.

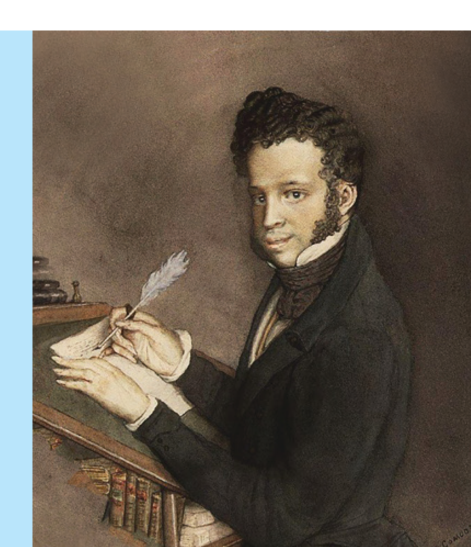
Pushkin was in exile when an unexpected uprising in St. Petersburg erupted in 1825. Alexander I had died that year. While his brother Constantine was next in line to inherit the throne, Constantine had married a Polish Catholic. He refused the throne, and it passed to his younger brother Nicholas. The dissident group of the Northern Society used the public confusion that ensued to demand a constitution. They asked troops in the capital to refuse to take an oath of loyalty to Nicholas I.

Known as the Decembrists, these poorly organized revolutionaries didn't stand a chance. Nicholas suppressed the rebellion, executed its leadership, and exiled hundreds to Siberia. Virtually all of the Decembrists had copies of Pushkin's poetry among their possessions. This speaks to how his poetry resonated, and how quickly he'd gained attention and prestige.

In spite of this, the new emperor Nicholas I didn't punish Pushkin in connection with the Decembrist uprising. Instead, he summoned the poet to a meeting in St. Petersburg. In exchange for commuting his sentence, the tsar told Pushkin that—from now on—the poet would be Nicholas' loyal servant, and the tsar would be Pushkin's personal censor.

PUSHKIN'S PASTIMES

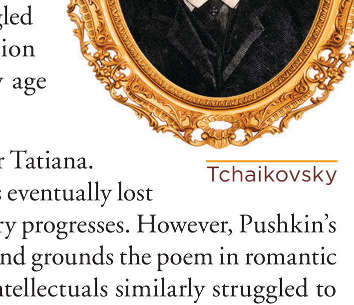
While he commanded the attention and respect of the St. Petersburg's literary salons, Alexander Pushkin's personal inclinations took him just as often to seamy brothels as they did to elegant drawing rooms. He was a study in contradictions—jeopardizing his entitlement by pushing parameters in art and endangering his life with self-destructive behavior.



Eugene Onegin

Between 1825 and 1832, Pushkin published arguably his most famous work, the novel *Eugene Onegin*. Pushkin himself described it as a "novel-in-verse," and it appeared initially in serial installments. The Russian composer Peter Tchaikovsky made this work even more famous by adapting it as an opera under the same title more than 40 years later.

Eugene Onegin presents the story of unrequited love between the honest and sincere Tatiana and the cynical, westernized nobleman Onegin. The novel conveys a tension that his country's elites wrestled with as they struggled to reconcile their long-held orientation toward westernizing influences in a new age of romantic nationalism.



Tchaikovsky

There is no happy ending for Onegin or for Tatiana. Her sensitivity, depth, and natural virtue is eventually lost to shallowness and superficiality as the story progresses. However, Pushkin's respect for Tatiana clearly comes through and grounds the poem in romantic ideals. Many other Russian writers and intellectuals similarly struggled to come to terms with what seemed to be a divided national identity during the 19th century's age of nationalism.

The Bronze Horseman and the End of Pushkin

Pushkin's poem *The Bronze Horseman* follows the plight of a man named Evgeny, who searches for his fiancée after one of St. Petersburg's devastating floods. Realizing that his love has been lost to the angry waters, Evgeny curses Peter the Great as he sits at the base of the emperor's bronze likeness, which depicts him on horseback. In turn, the bronze horseman rises in anger to confront the lowly man who has dared question him.

Pursued by this bronze horseman through the deserted streets of the capital, Evgeny finds only torment and ultimately death. In this poem, Pushkin is able to celebrate Peter's urban creation while he laments the cost of ruined lives.

Pushkin's censor, the tsar, declared that *The Bronze Horseman* was too incendiary to be published. Meanwhile, Pushkin had married the much younger—and quite beautiful—Natalia Goncharova a half-dozen years earlier, in 1831.


Natalia Goncharova

Having chased married women throughout his adult life, Pushkin now endured the anxiety of seeing other men pursue his bride. The most ardent was a Frenchman in the Russian royal guards by the name of Georges d'Anthes.

Eventually, Pushkin challenged d'Anthes to a duel. After initially being dissuaded from going through with the matter, it reached a head in January 1837. This time, there was no interruption. Pushkin took a mortal wound while d'Anthes survived his return fire. Pushkin died on January 29, 1837. He was the same age as the new century—just 37 years old. His literary legacy would outlast it.

Wounded Pushkin

With Pushkin gone, Nicholas now agreed to publish a sanitized version of *The Bronze Horseman*. The full version would not circulate widely in Russia until after the 1905 revolution.

Pushkin's enduring legacy was to give birth to a tradition of Russian writers who would provide moral leadership and direction to their country in generations to come. His efforts allowed subsequent greats like Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Gogol, Anton Chekhov, and Leo Tolstoy to follow in his enormous footsteps.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Kahn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin*.

Pushkin, *The Queen of Spades and Selected Works*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What insight can we gain about Russian culture and politics from Falconet's equestrian statue of Peter the Great and Alexander Pushkin's subsequent poem about it?
2. Why is Pushkin so important to Russian literature and to Russian identity itself?
3. How important is the concept of tension in Pushkin's art and life?



LECTURE 10

ALEXANDER II, NIHILISTS, AND ASSASSINS

This lecture examines the reign of Alexander II, the emperor of Russia from 1855 to 1881. His reign began promisingly and brought about the emancipation of more than 22 million peasants. However, his reign ended violently at the hands of revolutionaries, who assassinated him on March 1, 1881.

Early Reign

Alexander II assumed the throne at a difficult moment in the country's history. His father Nicholas I had died in 1855, at a time when Russia was close to defeat in the Crimean War. This conflict pitted the Russians against the combined forces of the British, French, and Ottoman Turks. It arose after the Russians sought to exercise their protection for orthodox subjects of the Ottoman sultan.

The 1856 Treaty of Paris brought an end to the conflict, costing Russia strategic territory and its reputation as a military power. This defeat convinced the tsar that if Russia wanted to compete against its neighbors in the future, it would need to modernize and reform.

Russia trailed its European adversaries and allies in many ways.

Russia had remained decidedly rural and agricultural, even as industrialization and urbanization quickened in Western Europe. Diseases, fires, and floods regularly damaged St. Petersburg and its population. Perhaps most damaging was Russia's lingering institution of serfdom. In a country with almost 60 million people, more than 22 million human beings were enserfed.



Serfdom was an affront against modern notions of human dignity and civil rights. It was also an inefficient and unproductive economic system, and the Russian economy languished as a result. For this reason, Alexander—soon after coming to power—was determined to abolish it.

Alexander versus Serfdom

Several of Alexander's predecessors had also seen the need to eliminate serfdom, but they'd avoided doing so for fear of the nobility's unfavorable reaction to losing their source of free labor. After Russia's embarrassing defeat in the Crimean War, Alexander saw no alternative but to begin dismantling this system of social and economic blight.

To get the nobles to agree to a reform that went against their immediate self-interests, Alexander appealed to the landowners' fear rather than to good will or reason. Speaking to an assembly of the Russian nobility in March of 1856, he told the crowd that change was inevitable, and that the elites needed to ensure that they controlled the transformation before it was too late.

Alexander formed commissions and eased censorship and the iron rule that had characterized his father's reign. This was to allow educated elites to suggest and debate the best way to end serfdom. It took several years to work out the details, but Alexander's Emancipation Manifesto was finalized on February 19, 1861.



After the Manifesto

Officials realized that the 22 million serfs who would gain their freedom needed to be given access to land. Because Russia hadn't yet industrialized, there was no way beyond agricultural employment to absorb such an enormous labor supply. The only solution was to take some of the nobility's land, yet the gentry's anger could prove just as dangerous as peasant frustration. Alexander decided to financially compensate the nobles for the land they lost.

Every element of the ensuing arrangement benefited the noble landowners. They selected the lands they wanted to retain and set the price for the lands they turned over to the peasantry. These prices were artificially inflated since they included a cost for the free labor being lost. Because the Crimean War had depleted the state treasury, Alexander resolved that the peasants would pay back the state for the lands they gained.

The Emancipation Manifesto abolished personal bondage and freed the serfs. However, it failed to give them want they most needed: enough land to farm and flourish. To add insult to injury, the Emancipation Manifesto indicated that the peasants would need to pay the state treasury back over the next 49 years at an annual interest rate of 5.5 percent in what became known as redemptive dues.

Uprisings

Before the abolition of serfdom, the incidence of peasant disorders in Russia had been rather low. Only 126 peasant disorders were reported across the Empire in 1860. However, in the year after the emancipation of the serfs, the number of peasant uprisings rose to 1,889.

It's interesting to note that even though the peasants rebelled, they still retained faith in their tsar and looked upon him as a paternal figure. However, another group of Russians weren't ready to let the state off so easily. Educated Russians believed that the systemic problems of inequality and injustice started at the top, with the tsarist system.

No group expressed greater dissatisfaction than the Russian intelligentsia. This was a group of thinkers and writers who used literature to critique the existing order. They wrote literary essays, novels, and even literary criticism that were designed to pointedly critique the economic and political status quo. To them, the Emancipation Manifesto was emblematic of a corrupt system that favored elites and sought to exploit its uneducated, underprivileged subjects while silencing dissent and critiques.

Other Reforms

Alexander realized that other reforms were needed to complement the end of serfdom. One of the most important of Alexander II's reforms was in education. Universities were granted considerable autonomy and academic freedom. They permitted the import of foreign scholarly works and allowed Russian students to study abroad. However, as soon as the state felt threatened—by student organizations, protests, or full-blown disorders—this academic autonomy was curbed, or disappeared entirely.

Similarly, although Alexander II's era of reforms included judicial reforms that allowed for regular courts and public jury trials, the government carefully decided when to allow public jury trials. More often than not, when the crime was of a political nature, Alexander's regime dealt with radicalism and even simple dissent with military court martials behind closed doors or exiles by administrative decrees.

LITERATURE

The harsh measures of Alexander II's regime began to drive young Russians onto a revolutionary course. It was at this time that the Russian literary greats Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy began to publish some of their most important works. The decade after the emancipation of the serfs saw the publication of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. Notably, *Fathers and Sons* presents two generations wrestling with the implications of a state in transition.



Assassination Attempts and Revolution



Dmitry Karakozov

On April 4, 1866, after Alexander II's daily walk in St. Petersburg's Summer Garden, a gunshot rang out. It was fired by Dmitry Karakozov, a 26-year-old nobleman with ties to a radical circle known as Hell. Alexander survived—for the time being—and Karakozov was quickly executed. The real casualty of this assassination attempt was the illusion that the person of the tsar was sacred. Suddenly, he seemed all too human.

A popular movement mobilized to improve the lives of the recently freed serfs. Radical thinkers such as Peter Lavrov and Mikhail Bakunin argued that Russia's privileged youth had a debt to repay to the masses, whose labor had generated their wealth and privileges.

These new populists urged young privileged Russians to work in the countryside to help lead a peasant revolution that would turn into socialism. In the summer of 1874, more than 2,000 Russian students answered the call. However, before long, gendarmes arrested many of them. While most activists avoided prison terms, 193 of them were incarcerated and awaited trial for more than two years. This would be known as the Trial of the 193.

When it began, proceedings were public affairs, thanks to Alexander's judicial reforms. Now, the plight of so many seemingly selfless young men and women aroused sympathy in liberal society. Even the acquittal of many of them did little to mute resentment against Alexander and his government. Instead, the proceedings accentuated the injustice—or inefficiency—of a system that had consigned essentially innocent men and women to prison for more than two years.

Russians didn't have much time to reflect on the Trial of the 193, however. A day after it concluded, a young female revolutionary named Vera Zasulich shot and wounded the military governor of St. Petersburg, General Fyodor Trepov.

She said that her assassination attempt was to avenge Trepov's brutal treatment of a political prisoner from the aforementioned Trial of the 193. Tsar Alexander believe that with such a clear admission of guilt, a public trial of Zasulich was the perfect way to make an example out of the violent radicals. However, in the spring of 1878, the jury acquitted Zasulich, expressing sympathy to the defendant rather than to the victim or the state.

Land and Freedom

Months before the Trial of the 193, an underground populist organization called Land and Freedom had sent some of its members to isolated villages to work amongst the people, and talk to them about socialism and revolution. This group's members were continually harassed by local officials, stymied in their work, and on the run from police.



Alexander Soloviev

Impatient for change, a Land and Freedom member named Alexander Soloviev decided to employ a different course of action. On the morning of April 2, 1879—as Alexander began his daily walk—the tsar encountered a young man dressed in a civilian uniform. This happened to be Soloviev. He fired several shots at Alexander, but all missed their mark. Alexander had survived another assassination attempt.

Soloviev, unlike Dmitry Karakozov—who'd tried to flee the Summer Garden after firing unsuccessfully at the tsar more than a decade earlier—was resigned to his capture and death. Weeks later, the state hanged him in St. Petersburg's Semenovsky Square, before a crowd of thousands.

The failed assassination attempt created a fissure within the populist Land and Freedom group. While some members argued that killing the tsar would accomplish little, others thought that terrorism directed at the emperor would initiate a revolution.

The People's Will

The group that believed in violence broke away, and, in August of 1879, reconstituted itself as the People's Will. Its mission was to end tsarist oppression and provoke a political revolution by assassinating the emperor. This new breed of revolutionary didn't expect to survive confrontation with the state. They vowed to become martyrs.

On March 1, 1881, they launched a two-pronged attack that succeeded in mortally wounding Alexander with explosives. The People's Will terrorist group had accomplished its mission. Alexander II was dead.

However, the tsar's passing did not usher in the revolution that his assailants had hoped for. Additionally, there would be no more reforms, for now.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Ely, *Underground Petersburg*.

Hartnett, *The Defiant Life of Vera Figner*.

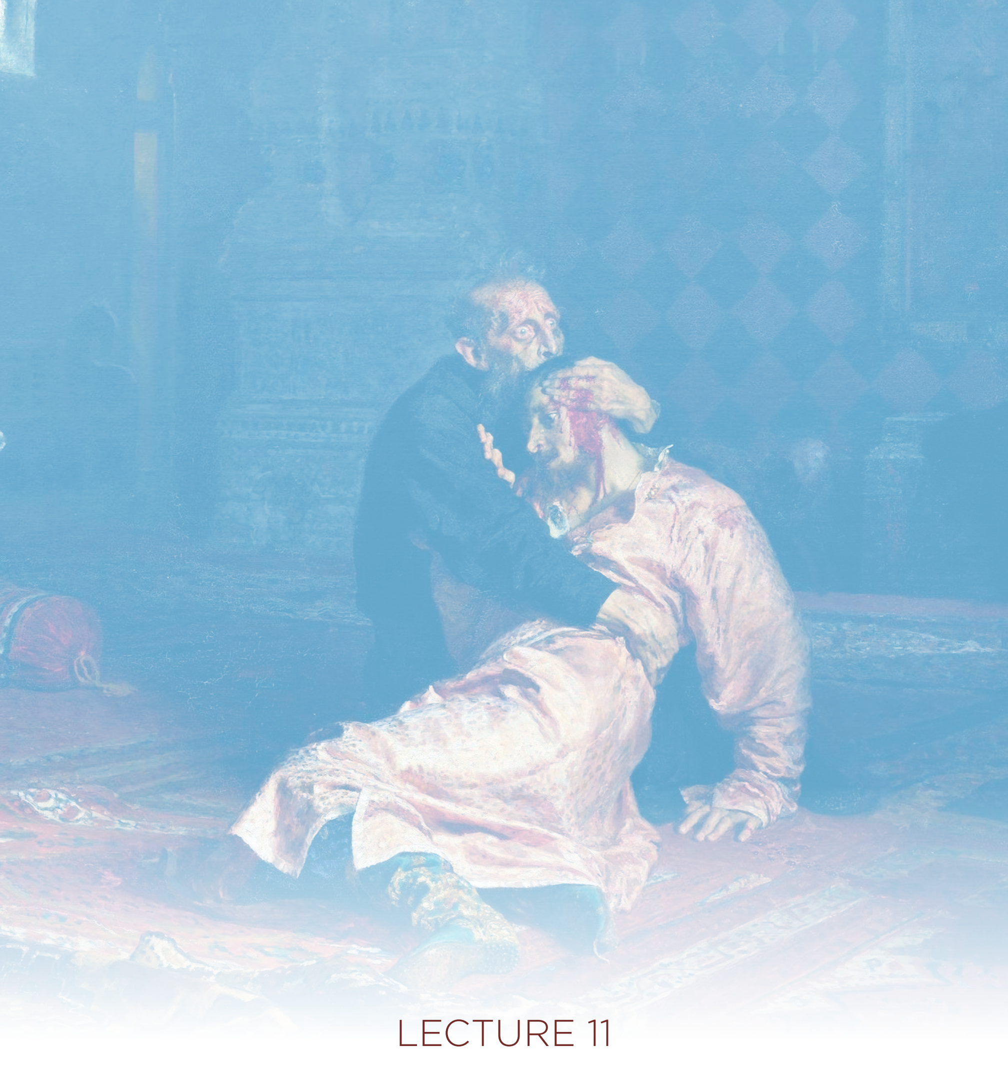
Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*.

Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*.

Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How was the intelligentsia's use of literature politically dangerous?
2. Why would terrorists assassinate Alexander II when earlier, more repressive tsars ruled without fear of such revolutionary extremism?
3. Is there a connection between the flourishing of Russian literature and radical energy?



LECTURE 11

THE AGE OF REALISM IN RUSSIAN ART

Russian feelings of cultural inferiority haunted the national consciousness since at least the early 18th century. However, those feelings eventually gave way to well-deserved national pride. A remarkable confluence of political and cultural factors coalesced during the reign of Alexander II to produce astounding artistic achievements. Its writers, musicians, and artists found their muse in their own country, in their own personal histories, and in the history and traditions of Russia. This lecture looks at some of their work.

Russian Revivals

For more than a century, Russian cultural achievement had been measured by the successful importation of European culture. This was the lasting influence of Peter the Great, the ruler in the late 17th century and early 18th century. European styles had become the cultural standard, supplanting the Russian Orthodox Church in establishing national tastes for music, literature, and other cultural productions.

This dependence on cultural imports began to change, however, through the genius of Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837). He launched a new Russian literary language. While still adopting certain prose and poetic styles from abroad, he nevertheless infused them with a uniquely Russian character.

In Pushkin's 1834 novella *Queen of Spades*, a countess asks her grandson to fetch her a novel. He asks whether she wants a Russian one, and the countess is taken aback, asking if any such novels exist. Assured they do, the countess excitedly asks the grandson to bring her one straight away. Pushkin was making Russians aware that their culture had come of age.



Pushkin wasn't the only source of artistic energy in imperial Russia during the 1830s—just the most celebrated one. The Ukrainian-born writer Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) had begun to publish his own works of drama and humor, including the satirical play *Inspector General*.

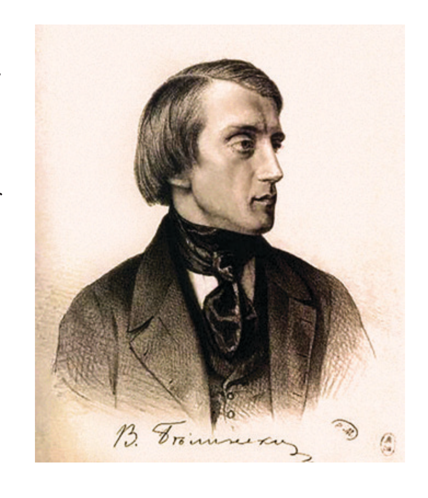
Composer Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857) produced the supremely patriotic opera *A Life for the Tsar*. This opera focused on the story of a simple Russian peasant who sacrificed his life for his country by leading astray the invading Polish army early in the 17th century. Glinka's production certainly delighted Tsar Nicholas I. It was a dramatic celebration of the style of nationality Nicholas promoted, and which was revived decades later by Alexander III.



In an era when a surge of revolutionary sentiment threatened several European monarchies, Nicholas ruled with an iron hand to keep upheaval at bay. He used the Russian press to glorify the monarchy—and give his autocracy the illusion of widespread support—while enforcing strict censorship over artists and writers. Works like *A Life for the Tsar* articulated exactly the vision that Nicholas sought to promote—of a mystical union between an orthodox tsar and his people.

Realism

When Gogol's play *Inspector General* first appeared, literary critics delighted that perhaps Pushkin's successor had arrived. This was no sanitized depiction of Russian life. Instead, the corruption and ineptitude seemed all too familiar. The preeminent Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848) celebrated Gogol's ability to expose the harsh realities of life.



Belinsky was even more impressed with the debut of the writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), whose 1846 novel *Poor Folk* conveys the darker side of urban life. Through a series of letters between destitute friends, Dostoevsky captures the abysmal living conditions of the poor, and the degrading treatment they receive at the hands of the wealthy.



Inspector General and *Poor Folk* both mark a turn toward realism in Russian literature. Gogol and Dostoevsky would ultimately prove to be more monarchist than liberal, but their early writing epitomizes the realistic trend embraced by the liberal and radical intelligentsia.

IVAN TURGENEV

Among contemporaries, Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883) was a literary giant. His first major publication was a series of short stories published in 1852, called *A Sportsman's Sketches*. These stories grew out of Turgenev's life as a provincial noble. Turgenev's wealth stemmed from his family's position as serf-owning gentry. Even so, Turgenev presented the peasantry that populated his stories and novels sympathetically, with both appreciation and compassion.

A Change in Power

In spite of the control over the press that Nicholas I exercised, by the later part of his reign, the pages of literary journals like *The Contemporary* were filled with vigorous debate about the appropriate direction forward for imperial Russia. Some believed it was best to continue the embrace of European culture, philosophy, and technology. These thinkers—who counted Turgenev and Belinsky among their number—were deemed Westernizers. In contrast, their ideological antagonists—the Slavophiles—argued that Russia's greatness needed to be unlocked domestically. In the Slavophiles' view, it was Russian culture and religion that should be nurtured and embraced.

Nicholas I was confident in his course, and saw no need to relax his control of Russian society. However, Nicholas died in 1855, amid the Crimean War, in which Britain and France took the side of the Ottoman Turks against the Russians—and prevailed. If Russia was feeling confident about its military and technology after having resisted the French invasion a few decades earlier amid Europe's Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean conflict shattered these illusions.



Devastation from the Crimean War

Nicholas's son, Alexander II, was of a different mind than his father. After inheriting the throne, he accepted the peace terms outlined by the March 1856 Treaty of Paris—which safeguarded Ottoman Turkey, and required Russia to surrender southern Bessarabia—and he resolved to set Russia on an improved path moving forward. Most notably, he moved to abolish serfdom.

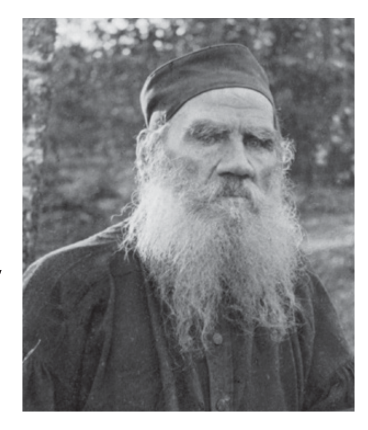
Afanasev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy

The Russian historian and scholar Alexander Afanasev (1826–1871) published a collection of Russian folk tales that began to appear the same year that Alexander came to power. His work stimulated interest in Russian native culture. It had a huge influence on its writers, painters, and composers.

Alexander II, after several years of debate and planning, abolished serfdom—with its 22 million Russian serfs—in February 1861. Around the same time, the writer Fyodor Dostoevsky was quite active. Dostoevsky's most sympathetic characters are sinners who discover redemption. In his classic novel *Crime and Punishment*, published in 1866, the woman Sonia Marmeladova—who is the daughter of a drunk—prostitutes herself to help her family.

Dostoevsky published his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, in 1880, just months before his death. In this novel—which many consider his greatest masterpiece—he layers deep philosophical questions within a murder mystery. He also poignantly incorporates elements of his own life: from the ordeals of epilepsy to the experience of exile.

Finally, there is no more famous Russian author than Leo Tolstoy. Literary critics have said that Tolstoy possessed an unparalleled ability to convey the essence of an individual with poignant detail, especially in the realist novels *War and Peace*—Tolstoy's first great novel, written between 1863 and 1869—and *Anna Karenina*, published in 1877.



Visual Arts

Realism flourished in the visual arts as well. Russian landscapes became a standard subject, as artists sought to examine the country's history on canvas. The Russian Academy of the Arts in St. Petersburg had been training imperial painters and sculptors since Empress Elizabeth established it during the mid-18th century. A century later, the spirit of reform that accompanied the emancipation of the serfs now sparked a sense of protest within the academy.

In 1863, 14 independent-minded students challenged the faculty's refusal to allow them to pick their own subjects to paint. Led by the student Ivan Kramskoi, the young artists withdrew from the academy. They went on to establish their own artistic collective in rented space in the middle of St. Petersburg.

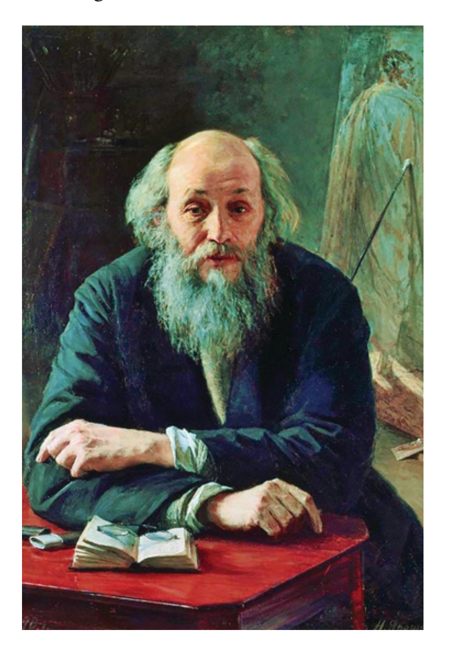
By 1870, this group had formed itself into the Society of Wandering Exhibitions, or the Wanderers. The Wanderers believed that art should reflect real life and that individual personalities should be conveyed on their canvases. Instead of confining themselves to St. Petersburg and Moscow, the Wanderers sought to organize exhibitions across Russia to foster public understanding of the arts.



They had a powerful ally in their corner. This was Pavel Tretyakov, a wealthy merchant and passionate Slavophile who wanted to nurture native artists. Much of Russia's artistic energy over the previous century had come from St. Petersburg. Tretyakov, through his patronage, shifted it to Moscow.

In 1872, Tretyakov began to build a gallery to house his acquisitions. This would become the world-renowned Tretyakov gallery. From this point on, he provided a steady market—and reliable patronage—for the Wanderers and other Russian painters.

Artists also began to celebrate Russian writers through portraiture. These were the leading novelists, social critics, and playwrights of their day. Tretyakov commissioned several portraits for his growing collection. He was anxious to document the flowering of Russian culture.

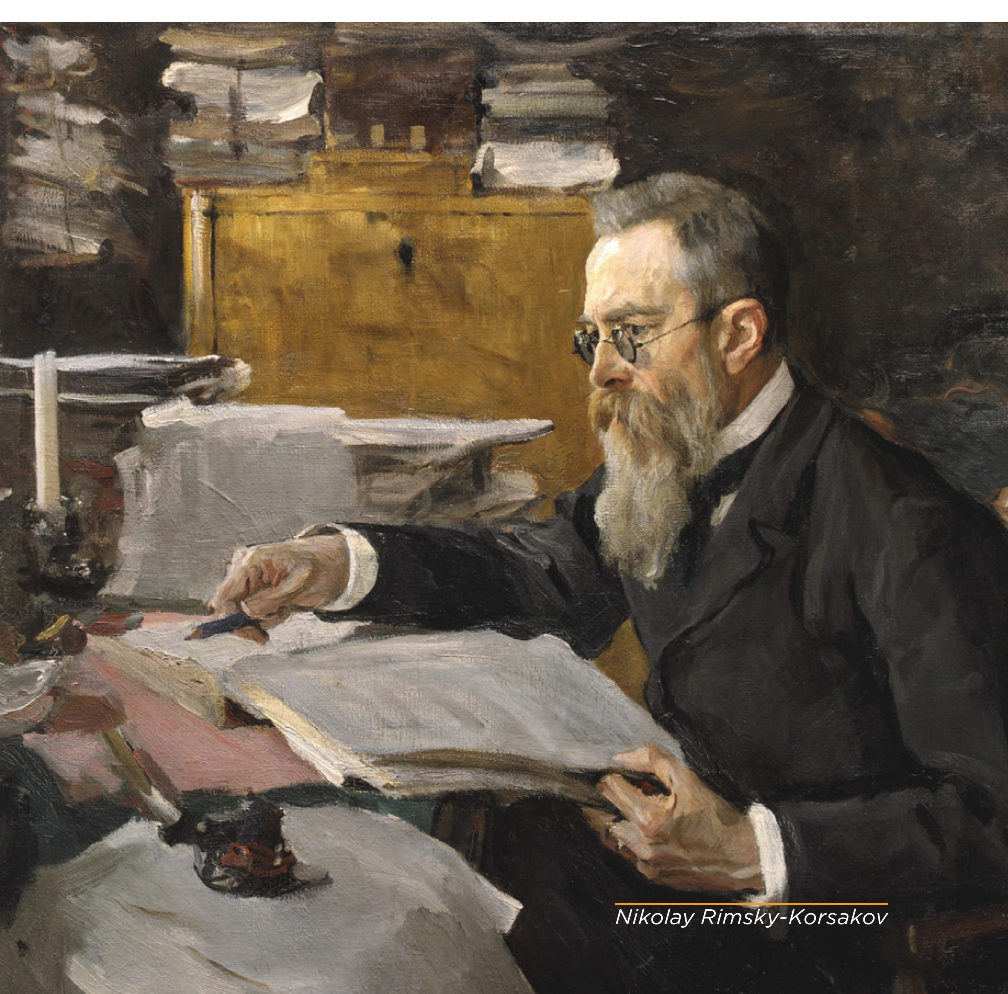


Among the favorite portraitists was the Russian realist Nikolai Ge (1831–1984), who painted the author and political activist Alexander Herzen while both were living in Western Europe. Ge's portrait—completed in 1867—is a sublime work of the realist movement. Herzen's face is half lit, with the other half in shadows. This conveys Herzen's fate as a man caught between two worlds and two eras.

Of all the visual artists of the age, the most famous was certainly Ilya Repin. A notable example of his work is *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, which depicts an exhausted and straining group of men known as *burlaki*. Their job was to drag sailing ships upriver against the flow of the current. Repin individualizes his 11 subjects to capture the brutality of the work. They appear to differ in age and ethnic backgrounds while sharing their grueling burden.

Music

Alexander II's reign also inspired what can be considered musical realism. One such group was known as the Five. It consisted of the composers Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, Mily Balakirev, and Cesar Cui. Collectively, the Five tried to create a distinctly national sound that was more than just a reflection of European styles. They did so in part by looking to Russian folk music. Their most significant work was in the form of opera, focused on Russia before Peter the Great shifted his country's attention westward.



Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov

Modest Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* is a case in point. Finished in 1874, it transports audiences back in time to the court of Godunov, from 1598 to 1605. Mussorgsky incorporates the play of the same name, by Alexander Pushkin, to portray Godunov as an illegitimate ruler who came to power by arranging the murder of Ivan the Terrible's son.

Mussorgsky died in 1881 from chronic alcoholism. His friend and fellow composer, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, revised the opera. It continues to be a Russian favorite, performed around the world to the present day.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Blakesley, *Russia and the Arts*.

Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*.

Rzhevsky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*.

Tolstoy, *War and Peace*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why was realism so novel and so influential? What prompted its development? How did this period of realism affect global perceptions of Russian art and its significance?

2. Was there consistency among the literary figures and authors during this period? Can we define them from a political perspective?

3. How did Russian painters and composers explore Russia's history and identity in their works during this period of artistic realism?



LECTURE 12

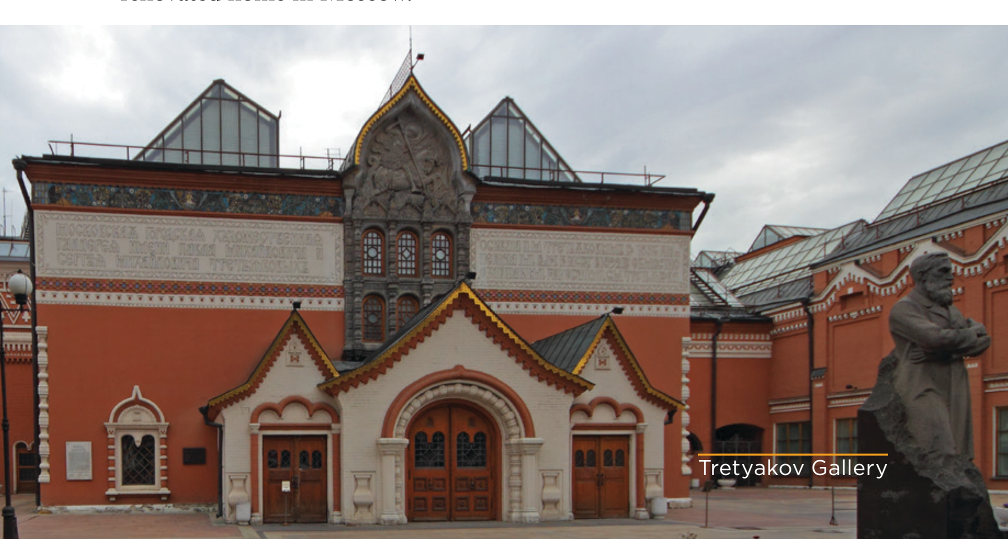
RUSSIAN FIN DE SIÈCLE AND THE SILVER AGE

By the end of the 19th century, Russian artists were taking great pride in their own national achievements, and Russian art and culture were on their way to being considered among the most exceptional in the world. Russia began to industrialize with vigor during the 1880s and 1890s at the supremely capable hands of Finance Minister Sergei Witte. When industrialization finally came to Russia, it generated enormous wealth while also inspiring an increasingly active workers' movement—and a new generation of revolutionaries.

Within this group of rising new capitalists were committed art patrons. The wealthy merchant and art lover Pavel Tretyakov (1832–1898) led an impressive number of the growing wealthy industrial class in becoming patrons of the arts. As a cohort, these men and women helped to stimulate what has been called Russia's Silver Age.

Patrons

Tretyakov commissioned portraits of Russia's great writers, painters, and composers. After the death of his young brother Sergei (who was also an art lover and collector), Tretyakov went on to donate both of the men's amazing collections to the city of Moscow in 1892. Six years later, when Pavel Tretyakov passed away, in accordance with the terms in the collector turned donator's will, the Tretyakov Gallery opened in the family's renovated home in Moscow.



Tretyakov Gallery

Another of Russia's wealthy art patrons was Savva Mamontov (1841–1918), an industrialist whose family made a fortune by investing in the country's expanding network of railroads. Mamontov hosted artists in his Moscow home. His interests led him to establish an artists' retreat at his Abramtsevo estate outside of Moscow.

Mamontov ultimately lost his fortune after he was falsely accused of embezzlement at the turn of the century. Before that, he and his fellow art patron, Princess Maria Tenisheva, sponsored a new magazine called *Mir iskusstva* (*The World of Art*). It was run by an innovative art critic named Sergei Diaghilev and his collaborator, Alexandre Benois.

Diaghilev and Benois—who was a theatre director, painter, and librettist—used their journal to inject further vigor into the Russian arts scene. Everyday items like icons, toys, and the cheap hand-colored prints known as lubki came to be celebrated for their artistic value. New artists increasingly applied their talents to produce jewelry, pottery, embroidery, furniture, and interiors.



Literature

In literature during this period, the soul-searching novels of Russian literary giants Dostoevsky and Tolstoy gave way to short stories and plays. They also gave way to the cheeky apathy and desperate disillusionment of Anton Chekhov's works, such as *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1899), *Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1903). There aren't clear-cut heroes or villains in Chekhov's literature. Instead, his characters seem recognizable, often unexceptional, and relatable.

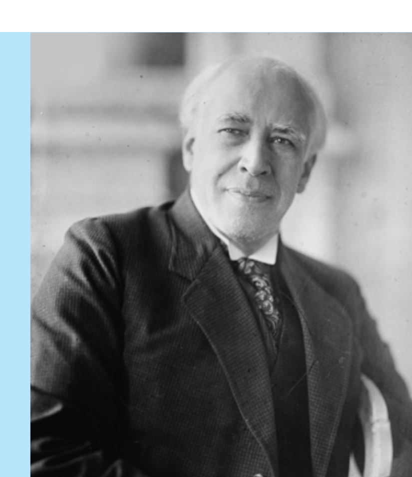
The playwright presents the tedium that invariably confronts people at times, as well as the counterproductive longings that can distract people: unfaithful spouses, gambling debts, and marriages forged out of tempered consideration rather than passionate love. Chekhov's characters and plots also remind readers of how human beings can easily complicate their own lives, often unnecessarily.

Theater

The new Moscow Art Theatre—founded in 1898 by the actor and textile industrialist Konstantin Stanislavsky and the playwright Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko—created an innovative dramatic experience that heightened the prestige of the theater and its artists alike. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko encouraged risk taking and innovation in ways that would have been anathema in the more conservative and established imperial theaters funded by the state.

METHOD ACTING

Konstantin Stanislavsky developed the practice of method acting—that is, emotionally expressive performances, based on personal identification with the part. Method acting wound up revolutionizing the field of drama.



In the Moscow Art Theatre, directors found the opportunity to stage productions with creative lighting and technological innovations, including a revolving stage. Techniques as simple as dimming the theater's lights so that audiences would focus on the actors rather than on each other helped to elevate drama to a high art form. In recognition of the role that its staging of Chekhov's *The Seagull* played in its subsequent success, the Moscow Art Theatre adopted a seagull as its emblem.

Another theater, just a short walk away, already enjoyed a long history—and storied tradition—at the time. Established by Catherine the Great a century earlier, the Bolshoi Theatre was a grand building with a six-tier auditorium that could accommodate more than 2,000 people. Impressive to look at, the Bolshoi Theatre also featured some of the best acoustics in the world. This was important because its specialty was Russian and European opera. Some of the more important works that the Bolshoi staged during the 19th century included Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Ludmila*, Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, Alexander Borodin's *Prince Igor*, and Peter Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and *Queen of Spades.*



Ballet

The Bolshoi Theater also hosted ballets, although in the 19th century, the Bolshoi's ballet took a backseat to the St. Petersburg Mariinsky Ballet. The extraordinary ballet master and choreographer Marius Petipa served as the Mariinsky theatre and school's principal master from 1862 until 1903. He revolutionized the art form.

Russian ballet also benefited from the work of composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. He loved ballet and wrote music that was essential to its production, rather than serving as mere accompaniment, as had been customary in the past. Notable scores of his include those for *Swan Lake*'s Odette, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker*.

Sergei Diaghilev also worked to promote Russian ballet. He enlisted supremely talented painters like Benois, Leon Bakst, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, and Alexander Golovin to design sets. Musicians such as Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev composed scores. Dancers and choreographers like Vaslav Nijinsky, Michel Fokine, and Anna Pavlova brought his vision to life. This venture became known as the Ballets Russes.

By 1911, the Ballets Russes was performing extended engagements in London and had a permanent home in Paris. Its ballets and operas—rooted in Russia's cultural history—allowed artists to communicate their interpretations of Russian folk art and folk tales to non-Russian audiences.



Anna Pavlova

Russian Artists

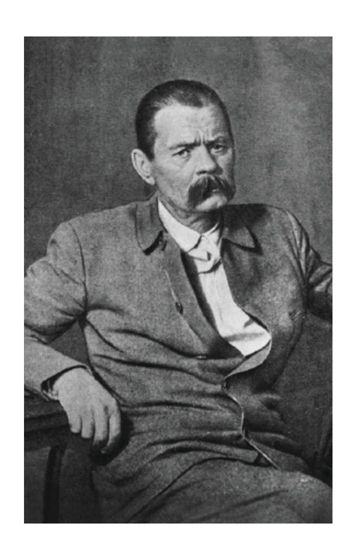
Works by the French painters Paul Cézanne, Paul Gaugin, and Henri Matisse challenged Russian artists to rethink their previous assumptions. Russians also began to meld trends from post-impressionism, cubism, and futurism in their revivals of peasant and abstract art.

Gauguin's work exerted a particular influence on Russian painters. He was part of a movement known as primitivism, whose adherents eschewed industrialism for pre-industrial, non-Western cultures. Russian artists embraced Gauguin's ideas, but instead of traveling to Tahiti for inspiration—as Gaugin had done—the Russians focused on Russian folk culture.

The avant-garde Russian painter Natalia Goncharova collected peasant dolls and toys and studied peasant woodcuts and embroidery. Her work employed bold colors and stark lines. Her 1909 painting *Fishing* is a perfect example of this marriage of styles. Another example is David Burliuk's 1910 painting *Peasant and Horse*.



Russian Writers



A new cadre of radical writers eventually came to the fore to highlight the failings of the Russian government and elites. One of these was the writer Maxim Gorky, whose first collection of stories—published in the last years of the 19^{th} century—presented the struggles of Russia's oppressed working class.

His play *The Lower Depths*, performed at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1902, depicts the misery and the hopelessness of Russia's poor. This work earned Gorky radical fans as well as official opprobrium. He was arrested several times and, after 1905, spent almost a decade living in European exile.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Blakesley, *Russia and the Arts*.

Figes, *Natasha's Dance*.

Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell*.

Rzhevsky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*.

Wiley, *A Century of Russian Ballet*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How important was the patronage of Russia's merchant and industrial class to the development of the arts?
2. How did the Moscow Art Theatre transform theatrical performances and experiences?
3. Why did the Russian ballet become so influential?



LECTURE 13

EMPIRE ACROSS TWO CONTINENTS

This lecture charts the Russian tsars' development of a great Eurasian empire over a number of centuries. The story is one of conquest. As the focus of Russian princes and entrepreneurs expanded outward, their agendas came to have much in common with the colonizers of British India, the Spanish in the Americas, and the Dutch in the East Indies. The Russians firmly believed that the expansion of their territory was part of a wider civilizing mission of non-Russian and non-European populations.

Ivan the Great and Ivan the Terrible

When Western Europeans thought of Russia around the time of the Italian Renaissance—if they did so at all—it was without much concern, interest, or apprehension. Russia was a distant, innocuous state on the far eastern periphery of Europe. Its 13th-century conquest by the Mongols tremendously set back this Slavic country, although only a few decades earlier, the Kievan Rus' (as Russia was then known) had a rich culture.

After the Mongols' invasion, imperial and political fortunes began to fade. Tsar Ivan III announced the end of Russian subordination in 1480. He formalized a trend that had been underway since the start of his reign in 1462. Known as Ivan the Great, he centralized his control as tsar and the position of Moscow among Russian principalities.



Ivan III subdued his neighbors and annexed their territory. He reestablished diplomatic relations with foreign states, and he built the Kremlin as an architectural manifestation of Russian power. This took shape on the heels of the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The Byzantine Empire—as heir to the great Christian empire of Rome—had been vanquished by an Islamic power. Ivan III now sought to promote Moscow in Constantinople's place. Ivan III, along with his son Vasily and grandson Ivan IV, conceived of (and presented) Muscovite Russia as the only independent orthodox realm in the world.

Ivan IV—known to history as Ivan the Terrible—claimed the title of tsar from the moment of his coronation in 1547, when he was just 17 years old. He undertook to push out the borders of his territory and, in the process, transformed the state of Muscovy into the first true Russian empire. This began with his conquest of the Tartar khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan in 1552 and 1556, respectively. These victories were pivotal in the development of Russia's Eurasian land mass.

Incorporating Kazan and Astrakhan extended the state along the southern Volga, down to the Caspian Sea. The Caspian was landlocked, but control of the Volga—and, in time, access to the Caspian waterway—allowed for the expansion of Russian trade, wealth and power.



Mongol Territory

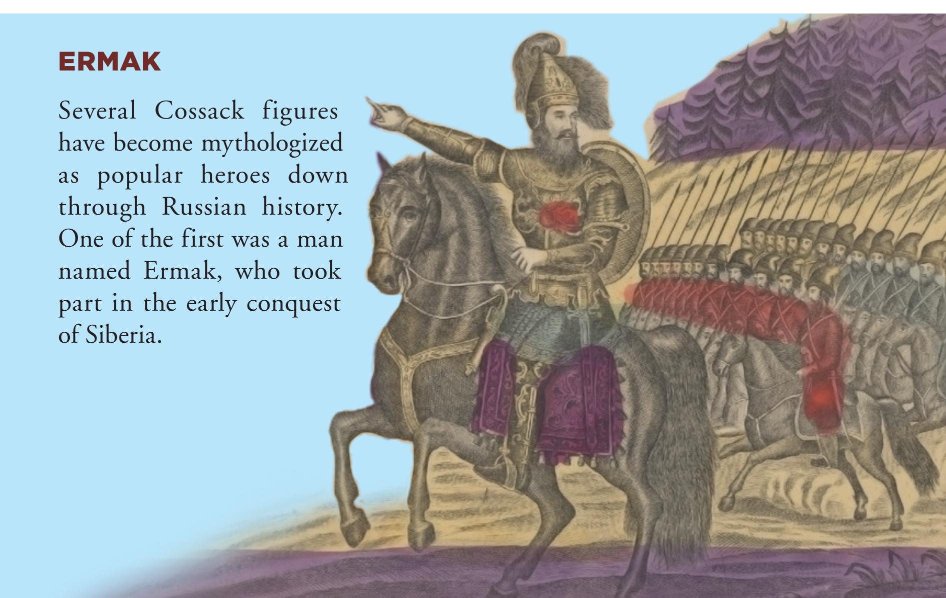
Disarray in the Mongol empire left a great power vacuum in the broad expanses of Siberia and Central Asia, and the Russians capitalized on it. As an example, the Stroganovs were a wealthy merchant family who had settled in a mineral-rich northern region more than 1,000 kilometers from Moscow. Having amassed a fortune through trade and salt mining, the Stroganovs solicited the tsar's favor by funding expeditions into Siberia. They even proposed to move across the Ural Mountains, into a vast expanse of largely undeveloped lands that had constituted the territory of the Golden Horde, at the westernmost edges of the Mongol empire.

The coniferous-forest regions of the Siberia *taiga* served as home to an astounding array of animals, whose pelts fetched great prices on international markets. Mink, sable, ermine, otter, and fox became known as "soft gold." This valuable commodity attracted many Russian trappers.

The Stroganovs hired detachments of men to move into these sparsely inhabited lands, and to subdue indigenous resistance in order to claim the territory for Russia. The Stroganovs built towns and then forts, and hired mercenaries—many of them Cossacks—to defend the settlements from raids by the area's nomadic tribes. They compelled locals to pay the *iasak*, or fur tax. With this began the Russian colonization of Siberia.

ERMAK

Several Cossack figures have become mythologized as popular heroes down through Russian history. One of the first was a man named Ermak, who took part in the early conquest of Siberia.





By the mid-17th century, Russia occupied most of Siberia and Central Asia. In 1648, the eastern expanse of the empire reached the Pacific coast. It had now added 4.5 million square miles to Russia's dominions. Although much of this territory was sparsely populated, it was not uninhabited. Scattered tribes occasionally resisted Russian forces, though without much success.

Peter the Great

After reaching the edge of the Pacific, Russian attention turned to the south. In 1696, Russian ruler Peter the Great secured a key victory over the Ottomans by the Sea of Azov. The Black Sea lay just beyond. This victory was important to Peter's quest to secure warm-water ports, and access to the Black Sea and the straits of Constantinople. However, it wasn't until the reign of Catherine the Great at the end of the 18th century that Russia would be able to claim dominance in the Black Sea region.

Still, Peter's accomplishments were notable. With a revamped army and newly created navy, Peter expanded Russia in every direction. After a 21-year-war with Sweden, Peter declared his country to be an empire in 1721. In doing so, he claimed strategic parity with the other great European powers.

Catherine the Great

Navigators and explorers in Russia's employ continued to press the limits of the empire. Vitus Bering, a Danish navigator hired by the Russians, spotted the Alaskan coastline across a body of water in the far northeastern quadrant of Siberia in 1741. It wasn't long before tiny Russian settlements arose in what is today Alaska.

Catherine the Great sponsored additional orthodox missions to Russian Alaska in the late 18th century to promote Russian influence on the other side of the Bering Sea. She hoped to use religion to colonize the distant wilderness for Russia. The distance traversed was too great, and the number of Russian settlers too few, for Catherine's plan to be effective. Still, her grandson Alexander sought to push the empire's borders even further.

Catherine the Great also pushed the empire's boundaries further west, through the Polish Partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795. Russia gained more of this territory after the Napoleonic Wars of 1812–1815. It also seized Finland from Sweden in 1809.

Catherine expanded southward after the Russo-Turkish War of the 1770s and a rout of the Ottoman Turks. This new territory became known as New Russia, or Novorossiya.

By 1783, Catherine had annexed Crimea, adding a substantial new population of Islamic subjects to her realm, and gaining full use of the critical Black Sea.

Catherine—and other Russian rulers after her—also sought to conquer the Caucasus, between the Black and Caspian Seas. The Russians annexed Georgia in 1801, and gained territory south to Azerbaijan and the eastern part of Armenia.

Alexander I

Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801–1825)—after defeating Napoleon—turned his full attention to the Caucasus. However, when the Russians tried to recruit native Islamic chiefs with financial rewards and land, they found little interest and few takers. Instead, local tribes responded with guerilla warfare.



The Russian general Alexei Ermolov was the man initially charged with subduing the resistance. Ermolov massacred opposing fighters and burned villages to the ground.

Further, the Russians seized the wives and children of fighters—and any unfortunate locals they found.

After decades of violence, in 1864, the Russians had pacified the region. Still, ethnic and religious tensions percolated; and, in the 1990s, resentments erupted in a new wave of violence.

Nevertheless, the extreme difficulty that Russia experienced in its 19th century explorations and adventures enhanced the Caucasus's reputation as a dangerous, exotic region on the edge—or perhaps just over the edge—of civilization. Ermolov's fierce tactics aroused more admiration than opprobrium among many Russians.

Nationality and Control

In the 19th century, many Russians saw the empire's Muslim subjects as ignoble savages in need of conversion and Christian civilization. Even so, by the end of the 19th century, fewer than half of the tsar's subjects were ethnic Russians.



Only a few decades earlier, Nicholas I—who ruled from 1825 until 1855—had said that he looked forward to the day when all the people within his territory would "speak Russian, act Russian, and feel Russian." To achieve this, Nicholas instituted the policy of Official Nationality, which revolved around the premise that Christian orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality constituted the essence of the Russian empire. To be Russian in an era of rising nationalist sentiment across Europe, one had to be orthodox and loyal to the Romanov leader.

This raised a question: While the Official Nationality policy privileged ethnic Russians, what did this mean for the empire's population that was not ethnically Russian? Unlike other overseas colonial powers where intermarriage was denounced, in the Russian empire, intermarriage (especially in border regions) was encouraged, according to the University of Virginia historian Robert Geraci. Beyond this, the Romanovs didn't waste much time on their less populous ethnic minorities. Their cultural prejudices already deemed Asian cultures as less developed and less threatening.

However, in the European areas of the realm, the situation was different—and potentially more challenging to the imperial order. For instance, after an uprising of Poles seeking independence from the tsarist empire, Nicholas I responded by eliminating many autonomous institutions in the Polish areas.

Ukrainians fared no better. Ukrainian publications were suppressed, and the Russians sought to minimize the cultural differences between Ukraine and Russia. The Ukrainian language was billed as merely a dialect of Russian, and even the name Ukrainian was shunned. Ukraine became officially known as Little Russia and its peoples as Little Russians.

Russification

Russia's last two tsars—Alexander III (r. 1881–1894) and Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) —were particular exponents of a 19th-century policy to maintain control in the empire's European areas by trying to make the people more Russian. This policy is known as Russification.

Enacted primarily through education and limitations on non-Russian literature and culture—especially in the western border regions—Russification was supposed to bring the people of the empire closer together. It was a policy of cultural homogenization.

The one constituency that the tsars considered impossible to Russify was the empire's Jewish subjects. Jewish culture seemed too formidable to coopt, with a strong religious, cultural, and linguistic identity that extended further back into history than any Slavic counterpart.

Earlier, Catherine the Great's Polish partitions had brought a significant number of Jews into the empire. Soon after, Moscow merchants petitioned the empress to enact some legislation to protect their businesses from Jewish competition.

Catherine complied and restricted Jewish merchants' activities to the regions annexed through the partitions. Over the next few decades, legislation limited Jewish residence to these areas. This region became known as the Pale of Settlement. Up to 5 million Jews lived in the Pale, where they suffered economic and political repression.



Alexander III and Nicholas II were both anti-Semites. As each man sought to repress revolutionary sentiment, they incited popular animosity toward the Jews to divert rising socio-economic tensions away from the state. This resulted in violent attacks against Jews called pogroms. As at so many other times and places in history, Jews became the official scapegoats during a period of political, social, and economic uncertainty.

Conclusion

Until the bitter end, the Romanovs maintained the Eurasian empire that Ivan the Terrible had bequeathed to them centuries earlier. Convinced of their religious and cultural superiority, the Russian emperors and empresses closely managed nationalist sentiment, and the occasional upheaval. However, when revolution finally erupted in 1917, the ultimate ineffectiveness of Russification, the Official Nationality policy, and the third-Rome theory all became quite clear.



SUGGESTED READINGS

Bassin, "Inventing Siberia."

Khodarkovsky, "Non-Russian Subjects."

———, "The Non-Christian Peoples on the Muscovite Frontiers."

King, *The Ghost of Freedom*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did Russia's position as an empire that extended from Europe through Asia affect its cultural identity?

2. How did the policy of Russification affect the non-Russian populations within the Russian empire? Were the effects uniform, or did they differ according to a population's location and/or religious identity?



LECTURE 14

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ROMANOVS

This lecture tells the real story of the Romanov dynasty, from its rise to power in 1613 until its bloody end in 1918. They came to power at a time of foreign invasion and civil war, and by the 20th century, they ruled one of the world's largest empires.

Background

The groundwork for Romanov rule was laid by the Rurik dynasty of the 15th century, led by Ivan the Terrible (r.1533–1584). Once Ivan died, his successors maintained a semblance of order for almost two decades. His younger son Fyodor succeeded to the throne in 1584 and ruled until his own death in 1598.



Fyodor

Fyodor was intellectually incapacitated and relied upon regents to rule for him. The first was an uncle. The second was his brother-in-law, Boris Godunov. When the childless Fyodor died, the Rurik line disappeared as well. Hoping to maintain a period of relative stability, leading nobles agreed that Godunov would succeed him as tsar.

However, famine gripped Russia, and resentment against Godunov escalated. A pretender posing as the dead Prince Dmitri—that is, Ivan the Terrible's young son—now invaded Russia from Poland. He was advancing on Moscow when Godunov died in 1605. Godunov's death facilitated the false Dmitri's accession to power as the new tsar.

The false Dmitri was overthrown and killed within a year. Other claimants temporarily seized power, including a second false Dmitri. Central authority effectively fell apart. Polish forces temporarily occupied the Kremlin.

By 1612, a grassroots army led by a butcher and a nobleman reclaimed the Kremlin. They vanquished the nobles who'd collaborated with the Polish invaders.

With the Poles and false rulers out of the picture, and the Rurik line extinguished, a power vacuum emerged.

At the start of 1613, the specially convened Assembly of the Land decided the issue. The assembly consisted of about 500 nobles, lesser gentry, clergy, merchants, and even some peasants. They selected as the new tsar the 16-year-old great nephew of Ivan's beloved first wife, Anastasia. This was the young Mikhail Romanov. His father, Fyodor, had been a major political player in the Kremlin until he'd run afoul of Boris Godunov.

Early Advances

Over the greater part of the next two decades, Mikhail reestablished the social order and stability needed for the country to move forward. Though he relinquished some territory to secure peace with the Poles, he also expanded eastward, conquering Siberia and extending the Russian dominion to the Pacific.

Mikhail died in 1645, and his son and successor Alexei achieved further advances. In 1649, Alexei presided over one of the most momentous developments of his 31-year reign: the establishment of a new law code called the *Ulozhenie*. Among other things, the code formalized the Russian system of serfdom, which tied the Russian peasantry to manorial estates. Government record books were now established to register the peasants.

Mikhail Romanov

Alexei's expansion of the state—and the power of the nobility—elicited resentment from those on the losing end of the arrangements. This prompted numerous uprisings. The most significant was Cossack leader Stenka Razin's rebellion on Russia's southeastern frontier from 1670 to 1671. When Razin was captured in 1671, Alexei had him quartered alive. The message of Razin's public execution was clear: Were the tsar to be challenged, he was determined to demonstrate his family's authority—and vengeance.

After Alexei

By the time Alexei died in 1676, Romanov rule was firmly established. At this point, Peter Alexeyevich Romanov—Peter the Great—took the crown and transformed Russia into a great European state.

From the time Peter the Great moved Russia's capital to St. Petersburg in 1703, the city became the main stage on which the autocracy demonstrated its culture, influence, and power. At the same time, danger increasingly lurked there. Court intrigue would topple three different emperors from 1741 until 1801.

In the years to come, it was also in St. Petersburg that Russian revolutionaries known as the Decembrists (who came from the upper class and military) called in 1825 for the creation of a free Russian state along with a federal government and constitution. A popular movement known as the People's Will adopted terrorist practices, and targeted and killed the Romanov tsar Alexander II in 1881. Finally, pushed to the brink by the upheavals of World War I, a revolution initiated by angry, hungry subjects would finally topple the Romanov autocracy in 1917.



Decembrist Uprising

Reforms and Repression

Each generation of Romanovs sought to lead in its own fashion—often recognizing the vulnerabilities of the autocratic state and how the backwardness of peasant society shackled the economy. Alexander II undertook one of Russia's single-greatest reforms in his Emancipation Manifesto of 1861 that ended serfdom on Russia's private estates.

Only reaction and repression came from Alexander III. With vigor, he went after the terrorist group the People's Will, which had murdered his father. In a few years, the terrorists were all executed, imprisoned, or driven into exile. No one was in greater awe of Alexander III than his eldest son and heir, Nicholas II. When Alexander III died in 1894, no one was more terrified, feeling himself unprepared to be tsar.

Nicholas II's Reign



The years of Nicholas II's reign were some of the most turbulent in history. The country had finally started the process of modernization and industrialization. This gave Russia some of the highest economic growth rates in the world. However, the autocracy was unprepared to manage the transformation of Russian society.

As social tensions and mass impoverishment took a higher profile, Nicholas and his ministers decided to initiate a war with Japan. The tsar's minister of the interior confided, "in order to hold back the tide of revolution, we need a short, victorious war."



The Russians weren't in a position to win the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. Instead, they suffered an embarrassing loss. As a result, the war aggravated social and economic tensions. When earlier Romanov rulers had previously faced such uprisings, the unrest traditionally occurred at the periphery—far from the center of government power. That wasn't the case in what became known as the Revolution of 1905.

More than 10,000 of St. Petersburg's industrial workers and printers went on strike. On a Sunday morning in January 1905, thousands of these workers and their families—along with tens of thousands of other Russian subjects—processed to the Winter Palace, led by an orthodox priest named Father Georgy Gapon. The crowd was peaceful, but guards opened fire, killing more than 100 people in a massacre known as Bloody Sunday.

Ten months after the Bloody Sunday massacre—in October 1905—a cascade of mutinies, protests, and rebellions culminated in a countrywide strike. Now, with Russia paralyzed, Nicholas II agreed to a series of reforms known as the October Manifesto. He promised to create a parliamentary body called the State Duma and to grant amnesty for political prisoners. He affirmed the people's right to basic civil liberties. With this the Revolution of 1905 promised a new age of constitutional rule.

However, by spring of 1906, Nicholas had reclaimed some powers. He'd retained veto authority over the State Duma, making it unable to promulgate legislation or pass decrees that weren't in keeping with his wishes. Violence increased rather than decreased. Revolutionary terrorists went on the offensive.

In the first eight months of 1906, 1,782 terrorist attacks claimed more than 1,300 lives. In response, Nicholas's government executed more than 3,000 people for political crimes over the next five years. Clearly, he faced monumental public challenges, but he also confronted private and personal challenges. The biggest was in his family.

Rasputin

Nicholas and Alexandra had celebrated the birth of a son, Alexei, in 1904. With his birth, his parents believed that the dynasty would continue. However, Alexei had hemophilia. Without the medical interventions that developed later in the century, hemophilia was a devastating, life-threatening condition.

HEMOPHILIA

Alexei's hemophilia—which prevented blood from clotting—was a truly serious condition. At the time, any bump, bruise, or scrape could prove fatal. However, by the 1930s, it would be discovered that certain snake venoms caused blood to clot when diluted. In 1937, Harvard physicians published a paper describing anti-hemophilia globulin found in plasma, which could decrease clotting time. Such measures were not available to young Alexei.



Alexei's precarious medical condition created the opening for the notorious Grigory Rasputin to enter the Romanovs' inner circle. The tsar's wife, Alexandra, made Rasputin's acquaintance through the recommendation of friends within St. Petersburg society. Rasputin himself was a peasant from Siberia, and a self-proclaimed healer and holy man. His healing powers were questionable, and his claim to holiness was unwarranted.

Regardless of his questionable character, the Romanovs—persuaded that Rasputin alone could heal and protect Alexei—became completely dependent upon him. Rasputin did produce a temporary remedy—likely calming Alexei with some variant of hypnosis, just enough to allow his body time to heal. Unfortunately, Rasputin also used his ingratiating capacity to ruthlessly advance his own material and political positions. His crude, horrid behavior irrevocably tarnished whatever mystique and charisma the Romanovs had retained.



Rasputin with his admirers

End of the Dynasty

In July 1914 the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina touched off the outbreak of World War I. The Russian people's patriotic fervor and dynastic appreciation was temporarily revived.

One month after the archduke's assassination, Russia invaded what was then East Prussia. In five days of battle at Tannenberg, in present-day Poland, German forces slaughtered Russian troops. Only 10,000 out of 150,000 Russian soldiers escaped. Once the casualties mounted, the tsar and his family were considered undeserving of continued adoration and support.

In late 1916, a small group of autocrats tried to save the Romanov dynasty. Among them were a cousin to the tsar, a conservative member of the Duma, and Prince Felix Iusopov, who was among the richest men in the capital. All previous efforts to convince Nicholas and Alexandra to get rid of Rasputin had failed. This conspiratorial group believed that their only hope was to murder Rasputin.



Late on the evening of December 16, 1916, the conspirators lured Rasputin to the palace of the wealthy Prince Iusopov, with the prospect of meeting the prince's young wife in an intimate setting. There, they first attempted to poison him and then shot him. They deposited his body in a canal.

The Romanovs were inconsolable at the death of Rasputin—but their own end was near, as well. In March 1917, after a week of massive protests, Nicholas II abdicated the throne. After almost 304 years in power, the Romanov autocracy had come to an end.



After Abdication

Nicholas II found an element of relief—and even happiness—after his abdication. Relieved of the duties and pressures of an office he was ill-suited for, he relished the days he spent at the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo with his family.

The first revolutionary government treated the deposed monarch and his family well. This changed when a second revolution led by Bolshevik radicals established a new workers' state. At this point, the Romanovs could feel the hostility of their captors towards them intensify.

Their treatment deteriorated when opposition to the Bolsheviks and their Soviet government brought the country to a civil war. The Bolsheviks transferred the Romanov family first to Tobolsk in western Siberia, and then to the home of a former merchant in the Ural town of Ekaterinburg.

The former tsar, his wife, their children, and some trusted servants were now prisoners of the new Bolshevik state. Optimistically, they awaited freedom, presumed to come through a literal king's ransom arranged by one of their relatives.

However, early on the morning of July 17, 1917, family members were awoken with word that there was fighting nearby. Guards moved them to a basement room, telling them that it would be safer there. Instead, once the family assembled, armed Bolsheviks walked in and pronounced their death sentences. Each executor had a designated target to avoid any mistakes. They proceeded to kill all five Romanovs.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*.

Lincoln, *The Romanovs*.

Perrie, "Popular Revolts."

Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does the history of the era before the Romanovs came to power help to explain the Russian willingness to embrace an autocratic system of government?
2. How does the sense of the people's veneration for the legitimate ruler come across in Russian culture?
3. Why did the Russian people ultimately move away from the traditional cultural belief in the sanctity and goodness of the tsar?



LECTURE 15

RUSSIAN RADICALS, WAR, AND REVOLUTION

Between 1861 and 1874, Tsar Alexander II undertook a limited program of liberalization in Russia's administrative, educational, judicial, and social apparatus known as the Great Reforms. This era of enlightened despotism ended with Alexander's assassination in 1881. The radicals who murdered him thought he'd done too little, too slowly. Now, the enlightenment would fade. Only the despot would remain in the form of Alexander's successors, who ruled oppressively and absolutely. Revolution would come on the heels of World War I, the devastating global conflict that pitted Russia against Germany on the brutal Eastern Front, and which left ordinary Russians hungry, cold and demoralized—with no faith that their government could manage the crisis.

The Breaking Point

The last Romanov tsar, Nicholas II—who ruled from 1894 until early 1917—tried to stave off popular unrest, largely through fear and repression. The breaking point came when his government proved incapable of steering Russia safely through World War I, the greatest crisis Russia had seen since the Napoleonic invasion of 1812.

Alexander Guchkov, the leader of the moderate Octobrist party, warned in 1913 of a greater impending catastrophe. He felt that Russia was on the verge "of being plunged into a period of protracted chronic anarchy which will lead to the dissolution of the Empire."

In February 1914, the tsar's security chief, Pyotr Nikolaevich Durnovo, warned the tsar himself that Russia was unprepared for World War I and likely faced defeat. Durnovo would die the next year, before his predictions became history—and fact.



Alexander Guchkov

Russia had tried its hand at revolution once already. In October 1905, after a turbulent year of strikes and protests—and the unsuccessful Russo-Japanese War of 1904 and 1905—Nicholas II raised the collective hopes of his people with a proclamation known as the October Manifesto.

Issued to halt a 10-day general strike that crippled the country, the manifesto established a state duma—a legislative body whose members would be popularly elected—and indicated that Russia would finally enjoy freedom of speech, press, and assembly.

In addition, Nicholas announced the amnesty of political prisoners to quell the raging turmoil that threatened to engulf the empire. However, over the next several years, thousands more replaced those freed. The tsar also declared that workers now had the right to form unions and strike. In the ensuing decade, the state inevitably responded viciously and repressively to interrupt work stoppages.

The state duma was only a quasi-parliamentary body, with no control over foreign affairs or military concerns. Furthermore, much of the budget fell outside the duma's control. The duma couldn't initiate or finalize legislation without the tsar's approval.

Emperor Nicholas II retained supreme power. Additionally, the same social, economic, and political tensions that had prompted what became known as the 1905 Russian Revolution still existed a decade later.

In the summer of 1914—as a new diplomatic crisis percolated through Europe—social unrest threatened Russia's domestic stability, as well. Yet when Nicholas II announced that his country was at war with Austria and Germany in August 1914, 200,000 of his subjects cheered him from Palace Square in St. Petersburg. In contrast, many of the young Russian soldiers called up to serve were less enthused. Massive state conscription campaigns in 1914—and again in 1916, in Central Asia—were met by riots.

Among the worst decisions Nicholas II made was to ban the manufacture and sale of alcohol beginning in July 1914. The Russian state obtained up to a third of its revenue from the government monopoly on the distillation and sale of alcohol. Just when the government needed funds more than ever, the tsarist needlessly slashed an important source of its income.



PETROGRAD

In 1914, the Russian government renamed St. Petersburg to the more Slavic-sounding Petrograd in a burst of patriotic sentiment. It retained that name until Lenin's death in 1924.

Russian Losses

Russia mobilized almost 15 million men and had a casualty rate greater than 60 percent, suffering more losses during World War I than any other country. Only weeks after hostilities began, 140,000 men were lost to the Germans at the disastrous Battle of Tannenberg, in present-day Poland. And this was just the beginning. By spring 1915, Russia had no choice but to retreat before a combined German-Austrian onslaught.

That year alone, some 2.5 million Russian soldiers were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. As they fell back, a scorched-earth policy in retreat rendered life untenable for many civilians. Three to four million civilians were displaced. Refugees flooded into cities. Massive inflation threatened economic collapse.

The duma urged Nicholas II to reorganize his government and appoint a new council of ministers. He refused and also took personal command of the army, with staggering losses. Meanwhile, Nicholas was being counseled at home and in the offices of government by his mystical adviser, Grigory Rasputin. With Nicholas at the front after September 1915, Rasputin seemed to exercise ever more influence over his wife, Alexandra, and the government.

In December 1916, conspirators seeking to restore the Romanovs' reputation murdered Rasputin. By this time, the country was exhausted from three years of war, ethnic tension, food and fuel shortages, and a loss of faith in the government. The concept of the emperor's divine infallibility evaporated.

1917

On February 23, 1917, a common spark ignited the human tensions into revolution. Women in the capital organized demonstrations to protest food shortages and working conditions as part of the commemoration of International Women's Day. By the end of the day, more than 100,000 striking workers and demonstrators were in the streets. The next day, 200,000 people turned out.

On Sunday, February 26, 1917, the tsarist government ordered soldiers to fire on the growing crowds. Some followed direction, killing hundreds of people. However, a general—and increasing—reluctance of soldiers to use force against the people did not go unnoticed.

The next day, February 27, was decisive. The state duma now declared itself to be the provisional government, having disobeyed the tsar's order to disband the previous day. Soldiers openly refused to move against the demonstrators.

Meanwhile, professional revolutionaries called upon workers to organize workers' councils—or soviets—outside of the largely privileged duma. Industrial workers answered the call. Within a week, more than 1,200 deputies were elected to the newly formed Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.



Soldiers demonstration.February 1917

Nicholas II never expected the situation to deteriorate so rapidly. He left military headquarters for Petrograd in an attempt to reclaim control. Along the way, his imperial railcar was stopped, and he was confronted by his complete loss of authority. After consulting with military leaders, and being forced to acknowledge that he had no other choice, Nicholas abdicated. He initially passed power to his brother, Mikhail Alexandrovich Romanov, who himself abdicated on March 3. The Romanov dynasty had ended.

After Abdication

In the weeks after Nicholas II's abdication, political and civic energy gripped the capital. Some 40,000 middle- and working-class women participated in the largest suffrage demonstration in the country's history—demanding that the provisional government extend to them the right to vote. Just a few months later, the provisional government declared universal suffrage along with broader political and civil rights. Voting— at a date still to be determined—would elect a new constituent assembly.

Two institutions were competing for legitimacy in the capital. Middle-class aspirations were represented by the provisional government, while workers and soldiers were more likely to align with the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Soviet refused efforts by the provisional government to merge the groups into a unified body.

Meanwhile, other soviets formed in cities across Russia—some 700 of them, consisting of 200,000 deputies. By October 1917, the number of soviets had doubled to 1,400. These were not Bolshevik-dominated bodies. Although there were Bolsheviks among them—that is, members of the self-described majority faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party—the soviets were diverse and fluctuating arrays of socialists, workers, intellectuals, and other activists.

In spite of hopes that Russia would end its involvement in the war, the government instead declared its commitment to see the campaign through to conclusion. Russia's Western allies recognized the provisional government as the country's legitimate authority, but the Russian working class was less convinced.

The Bolsheviks

By the fall of 1917, it fell to the revolutionary Bolsheviks and their leader, Vladimir Lenin, to settle the uncertainty. Lenin had been living in exile in Western Europe, but he had returned to Russia after February's revolution gained momentum. He had arrived on April 3, 1917.



Upon disembarking from a train at Finland Station in Petrograd, the Bolshevik leader delivered a famous address to supporters that had assembled to greet him. In it, Lenin called for an immediate peace, bread for the people, land for the peasants who worked it, and for all power to be transferred to the soviets.

Over the next several months, his message resonated with those most in need. Support grew, and by September, the Bolsheviks held majorities in both the Moscow and Petrograd soviets. In turn, Lenin planned to seize control of the government on the people's behalf. A Congress of Soviets—that is, a gathering of representatives from the many hundreds of smaller soviets across the country—was scheduled to convene in Petrograd in October.

That was when Lenin planned to strike. The provisional government unintentionally abetted his plans. The former legislative body had reorganized and appointed as prime minister Alexander Kerensky, who was a socialist but not a Bolshevik. Kerensky was also both a government minister and a soviet member, but he'd increasingly demonstrated that his primary allegiance was to the provisional government.

In early October, Kerensky's government announced that half the Petrograd garrison of Russian soldiers would be moved out of the capital to defend against the advancing Germany army. The Petrograd Soviet, however, viewed this as a provocative move and created its own military revolutionary committee to resist the transfer of Russian troops. When Kerensky's government gave the order to the garrison to march out, the military revolutionary committee ordered it to stay put. A confrontation was unavoidable.

In the early morning hours of October 24, 1917, Kerensky ordered the Bolsheviks' printing press closed, in the first organized move against the party that had defied the will of the provisional government. In retaliation, Leon Trotsky—the head of the soviet's military revolutionary committee—instructed his men and armed supporters to seize strategic points in the city.

By October 25, this group—known as the Red Guards—was in control of many important sections of the city. That morning, the Red Guards broke up a meeting of the Council of the Republic, which was filled with leading political figures from a wide assortment of parties. The Red Guards herded them out at gunpoint. Then, they besieged the tsar's former residence, the Winter Palace, where the provisional government was housed.

That evening, after a delay of several hours occasioned by the skirmishes between Red Guards and the defenders of the provisional government, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened. With cannon fire in the distance, some socialist leaders condemned what they described as a Bolshevik conspiracy and urged members to forge a united, democratic government.

A delegation of moderates now departed to offer their support to the provisional government. As they did so, Trotsky rose to condemn them. Hours later, news arrived that the Red Guards had seized the Winter Palace.

Just before 5:00 am on October 26, 1917, the Bolshevik intellectual Anatolii Lunacharsky stood to read a proclamation from Lenin's pen. Before a rump congress of Bolshevik supporters, Lunacharsky relayed Lenin's pronouncement: The Provisional Government had been overthrown, and the mantle of Russian power had been transferred to the Soviets. A second revolution had occurred, and a new era had begun.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Daly, *The Watchful State*.

Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*.

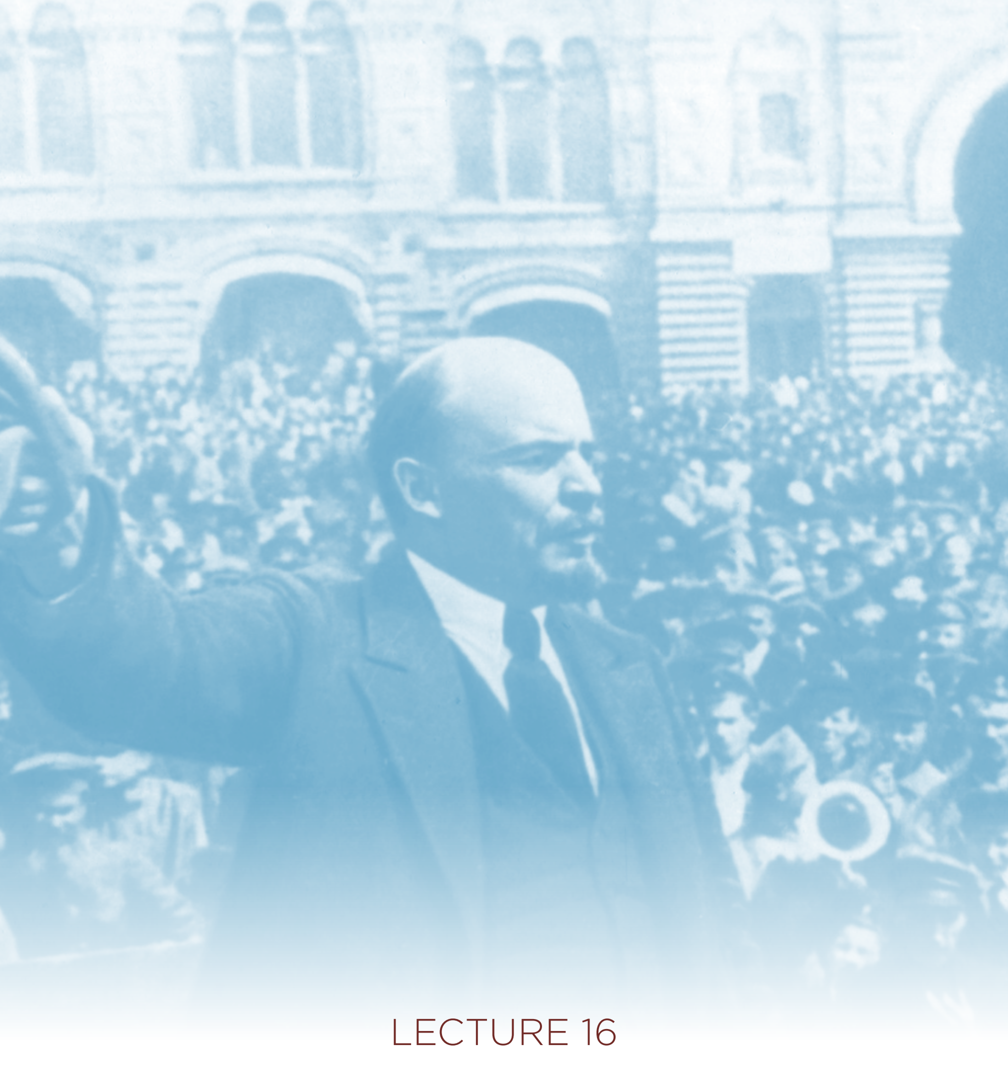
Stockdale, "The Russian Experience of the First World War."

Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why did the tsarist regime fall in 1917 when decades of efforts on the part of Russia's intelligentsia and revolutionaries had been unable to push the Romanovs from power?

2. Russian revolutionaries in 1917 believed that they were on the verge of remaking history. What may have prompted such a belief? Was it warranted?



LECTURE 16

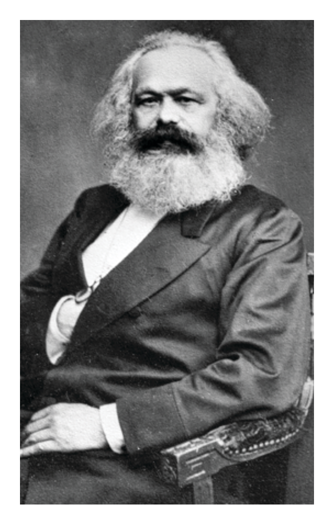
THE OCTOBER 1917 REVOLUTION

On October 26, 1917, a new Soviet government of Russia opened for business. The members of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets who witnessed this momentous beginning could hear gun and cannon fire in the distance. Hours earlier, the Bolsheviks and their militia—the Red Guards—had overthrown the provisional government that previously filled a power vacuum after Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the previous March. This lecture examines the Bolshevik seizure of power during the October Revolution and its immediate aftermath. This wasn't merely a political enterprise: Vladimir Lenin and his party viewed the revolution as transformative.

Lenin

Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks and founder of the Russian Communist Party, lived from 1870 to 1924. By the time the Russian Revolution broke out, he'd spent years writing and theorizing. He had a clear agenda.

According to formal Marxist doctrine, Russia was far from ready for the political and socio-economic transformation that Lenin imagined. The political theorists Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) both believed that a socialist revolution would take place in a highly industrialized, capitalist country. Russia was still mostly agrarian. Consequently, the Russian proletariat—in whose names the Communists took power—were predominantly peasants. They were a world apart from the industrial working class that Marx envisioned would produce a revolution.



Lenin had no interest in waiting for the conditions that Marx and Engels had prescribed. Instead of waiting for the revolution to develop organically, he constructed his own theory, adapting Marxism to fit Russian conditions.

The political doctrine known as Marxism-Leninism resulted. According to Lenin, an elite group of professional revolutionaries would propel the culturally undeveloped masses forward. These elites were the Bolsheviks, who would lead the revolution and overthrow the old order. Under Bolshevik direction, Lenin argued, socialism—and a dictatorship of the proletariat—would prevail. The theory of Marxism-Leninism would become Soviet dogma for the next seven decades.

In the years leading up to the Bolsheviks' moment, Lenin had lived in exile in Europe. He returned to his native country in April 1917, proclaiming that the popular uprising known as the February Revolution in the Russian capital had been only the first stage of revolution. Now, he argued, the less cooperation offered to the provisional government, the more quickly the country would pass to what he described as the second stage of revolution. This would put power in the hands of the Russian proletariat.



Bolshevik Organization

Over the next few months, Bolsheviks organized factory workers in the renamed city of Petrograd—what had been St. Petersburg until the start of the war—outlining the party's plans for a brighter future. They recruited the most ardent to join the Red Guards. Meanwhile, Russia faced enormous challenges even apart from those presented by the schism between Lenin's adherents and the provisional government.

By the summer of 1917, frustrations ran high. In July 1917, a large crowd of radical soldiers, sailors, and workers marched through the streets of Petrograd, demanding that power be transferred from the provisional government to the soviets. The soviets were councils formed by workers, soldiers, and a variety of socialists. By the summer, the soviets populated towns and cities across Russia.

The radical demonstrators in Petrograd carried banners with Bolshevik slogans. However, with no clear leadership, the unrest—which became known as the July Days—petered out after just a few days. Despite Lenin's lack of outward support for the July Days, this demonstration prompted members of the provisional government to see the Bolsheviks as their primary threat. Government forces arrested Bolsheviks across the capital. Lenin was able to cross the border to the safety of Finland before the police found him.

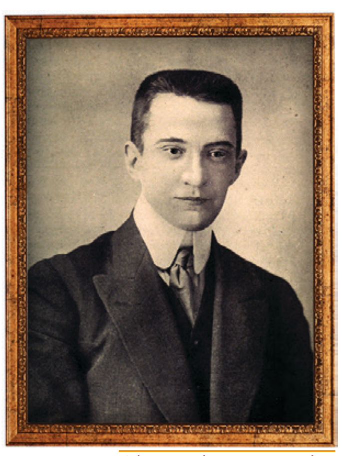
In August, the head of the Russian army, General Lavr Kornilov, attempted what most considered a counterrevolutionary coup. The Red Guard contributed to squelching this uprising and spurred on the Bolsheviks' popularity. In turn, popularity translated into more influence in the Soviets. By September, the Bolsheviks held the majority of delegates in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. Lenin now snuck back into the country, having decided that the time to pass to the second stage of revolution had arrived.



Bolshevik Takeover

The Bolsheviks, abetted by Kerensky's plan to transfer the bulk of the Petrograd garrison to the front, now overthrew the provisional government. At home and abroad, those factions opposed to the Bolsheviks described their forceful action as a military coup, without popular support. Soviet sources, on the other hand, categorized the October Revolution as the culmination of a rising of the Russian masses. It was neither. Instead, the Bolsheviks' armed military revolutionary committee—and radical rhetoric—found a way to take advantage of popular yearnings to impressive effect.

If Alexander Kerensky, the former prime minister of the provisional government from July to October 1917, had been able to enlist the support of Russian troops, the Bolsheviks would have been doomed. Instead, according to the British historian Orlando Figes, in his book *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution*, "The Petrograd garrison quickly fell apart … as the mass of the soldiers went on a drunken rampage or fled to their homes in the countryside." Kerensky, too, was compelled to flee to an old imperial residence.



Alexander Kerensky

The Bolsheviks now faced the enormous challenges of exercising and maintaining governmental authority. Almost immediately, in November 1917, Lenin announced that the new Soviet government would seek to end its participation in World War I. He proposed an immediate armistice. His government also issued a decree transferring land from the gentry, the church, and the crown to peasants. Factories were turned over to workers' control.

Lenin's proclamation, the *April Theses*—published a few months earlier—had called for such steps. Another critical aspect of the *April Theses* was Lenin's call to place power in the hands of the soviets. Ostensibly, this was the essence of the October Revolution. Power had been seized in the people's name, but Lenin himself betrayed the spirit of such egalitarian measures.



He circumvented the soviets by establishing a new body, the Council of People's Commissars, or Sovnarkom. In principle, the Sovnarkom didn't exclude the representation of other political parties. In practice, it quickly became an exclusively Bolshevik body. Among other hasty measures, the Sovnarkom decreed that it could pass urgent legislation without soviet approval. The Bolsheviks also used the Sovnarkom to suppress their political opposition. Few Russians realized it at the time, but the shift from soviet to Bolshevik power had begun.

In spite of these ominous signs, popular hopes for a new era of political freedom were fostered by Bolshevik support for the election of the Constituent Assembly. This was a measure originally approved by the now-defunct provisional government. The Constituent Assembly had been supposed to convene to write a constitution and form a government.

The elections were held on November 12, 1917. The Bolsheviks received only 24 percent of the vote, most of which came from soldiers and workers in the industrial north. While the Bolsheviks seemed to have support in Petrograd and Moscow, they'd struggled outside these major population centers.

Bolshevik Force

Lenin toyed with the idea of invalidating the results and abolishing the Constituent Assembly before it ever convened. Instead, he embarked on a propaganda campaign. When a group known as the Constitutional Democrats—the Kadets—organized a demonstration in support of the assembly, Lenin outlawed it. The Kadets' leaders were deemed enemies of the people, and dozens found themselves in prison cells of the former tsarist state. Not much had changed from the days of the tsars, beyond the identity of the jailors.

On the morning of January 5, 1918—as the historic Constituent Assembly was scheduled to open—thousands of unarmed demonstrators marched toward Tauride Palace in a show of popular support. As the crowd approached, Bolshevik machine guns opened fire, killing 10 of the demonstrators. By the time of the funerals, the Constituent Assembly had died as well. Lenin disbanded the body after one day, calling it a force of counterrevolution.

The Soviets' secret political police force—the Cheka—became an instrument to fully shatter the fossilized political and socio-economic forms of the old regime. The Cheka would root out counterrevolution and sabotage in the new state with whatever means deemed necessary.

The Bolsheviks now effectively centralized all power in their own hands—it was a one-party state—and used force and terror to destroy opposition. The Bolsheviks also enlisted the support and loyalty of the working class by empowering them to seize control of property, factories, and political organizations in their towns and villages. In doing so, Lenin diverted the anger of the masses into the exercise of power over the former elites. In effect, Bolshevik rhetoric empowered men and women who'd suffered from subordination in the past.



SOCIAL TERMINOLOGY

The inversion of social privilege was part of the Bolshevik plan to remake the very culture of their new state. Before the revolution, *gospodin* and *barin* were referential terms of respect akin to "mister" and "gentleman." After the revolution, they were used derisively, mockingly, and even dangerously. The term *burzhooi* also came to be used as a general form of abuse against anyone who appeared well dressed, foreign, or well off.



Breaking from the Past

The Soviets consistently presented the old culture as backwards and antiquated in addition to being unjust. In contrast, the new Soviet culture was said to be the most modern and progressive the world had ever seen. Here's one example: The new regime even changed the hands of the clock, so that the revolutionaries were now the masters of the time and day.

On the morning of February 1, 1918, Soviet citizens awoke to discover that it was actually February 14. Lenin and his party had changed the calendar. The Soviets' abandonment of the old Julian calendar—long favored by the Russian Orthodox Church—and the implementation of the Gregorian calendar held tremendous cultural significance in Russia.

The Bolsheviks also argued that the Russian Orthodox Church had been complicit in the despotism of the former tsarist autocracy. The Bolsheviks' first move against the orthodox center of power was to separate the church from the state. Once they accomplished this, they worked to dismantle religious influence on Russian life. First, the regime permitted civil marriages and encouraged burials apart from church ceremony. Then, the state secularized education, in an effort to break religious influence on Soviet youth.



Ruinous Peace

The Soviet government signed an armistice with Germany in December of 1917. However, the Germans resumed hostilities in February 1918, and now the situation was increasingly precarious for the Soviets. By that spring, Petrograd was in the throes of an existential crisis. Essential supplies remained hard to come by, crime was rampant, an outbreak of typhus claimed the lives of thousands of citizens, and the city came under threat of German attack. Its plight was so bad that in March 1918, the Soviet government evacuated Petrograd and relocated to Moscow, where the central authority remains housed to present day.

Under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, the Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky ultimately agreed to a potentially ruinous peace with Germany. Russia ceded the Baltic provinces, much of Belorussia, and all of Ukraine. This was some of the most productive territory in the country. The treaty also cost Lenin a great deal of popular support in a country facing economic collapse, and it gave fodder to the various groups determined to oppose Bolshevik rule.

This touched off a civil war that would cost the lives of up to 8 million Soviet citizens from fighting, famine, and disease, in addition to the 1.5 million or more who'd died in World War I. Although the Bolsheviks ultimately emerged victorious, the experience cemented their commitment to ruling by force. This would prove to be a stranglehold that remained in place for the next seven decades of the Soviet Union's existence.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Corney, *Telling October*.

Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*.

Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks in Power*.

Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is it more accurate to describe the October Revolution as a popular revolution or a seizure of political power by a political minority?
2. How much did various contingencies use historical events and cultural symbols to advance their political perspective in 1917?
3. How important were the Bolshevik decrees that affected cultural practices and social relations?



LECTURE 17

LENIN AND THE SOVIET CULTURAL INVASION

In the fall of 1917, after coming to dominate the socialist councils known as soviets, the Bolsheviks seized the reins of power. Signaling that a new era had begun, the Bolsheviks renamed themselves the Russian Communist Party in early 1918.

Civil War

By the time Lenin's party changed its name to the Communist Party in the spring of 1918, its hold on power seemed tenuous at best. For many, the peace treaty that the Soviet government signed with the Germans was the last straw. It's hard to imagine that the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk could have been worse for Russia. One-third of Russia's productive arable lands, one-third of its railway system, and almost 70 percent of its heavy industry were located there.

By the end of spring 1918, monarchists, former tsarist military officers, members of other political parties, and a sundry assortment of other anti-Bolshevik elements believed a civil war preferable to Bolshevik rule. Collectively lumped together as the Whites, they lacked any homogeneity beyond their loathing of the Bolsheviks. For now, these White forces engaged the Bolsheviks—renamed the Communists—in a brutal civil war.

Western democracies that formerly had allied with Russia during World War I were suspicious of the Bolsheviks' aims for a world revolution and viewed them as a hostile force. Some—including the United States—became involved in the civil conflict that was rippling through Russian society and threatening to undermine Lenin's government.



American soldiers fought briefly in Russia as part of two different operations from 1918 to 1919, though foreign military intervention was limited and swiftly withdrawn.

Early in Russia's civil war—which persisted from 1918 to 1920—the Soviets militarized the economy. Industries were nationalized, property was seized, and grain was forcibly requisitioned. Force and compulsion—along with the need for sacrifice on the part of the citizenry—defined this period. Even more, force and compulsion became foundational elements of Soviet culture.



The Red Army swelled to 5 million men over the course of the civil conflict. As these men returned to everyday life after the conflict, military mannerisms and jargon became ubiquitous in party slogans and the speeches of Soviet leaders.

The Cheka

The Cheka—the Soviet secret police—was the organization charged with surveilling the populace so that the state could transform it. The Cheka employed some 60,000 people and an extensive network of informants beyond. The power and pervasiveness of the Communists' security apparatus grew over the course of the civil war. By the end of the conflict, no part of Soviet life fell outside of the Cheka's interest.

EVOLUTION OF THE CHEKA

Originally conceived as a temporary body, the Cheka soon became a permanent feature of the Soviet system. It changed its name and leadership—morphing from the Cheka to the State Political Directorate, or GPU, and then to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD, under Joseph Stalin. The KGB followed after Stalin's death in 1953.

With lines blurred between allies and enemies, the Cheka used violence and revolutionary terror to maintain Bolshevik control. The most famous example occurred in a basement room at the Ipatiev house in the Eurasian town of Ekaterinburg, about 880 miles east of Moscow. There, local Bolsheviks executed the former emperor Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, and their five children early on the morning of July 17, 1918.

The use of violence—even against non-military populations—was now accepted. Even when rumors circulated that the Bolsheviks had murdered the entire family, there was little public comment or discussion, much less outrage.

Terror and Counterrevolution

Although the Soviet state now identified terror as a necessary weapon in the fight against counterrevolution, it never defined the elements of counterrevolution. As a result, virtually anyone could be considered a counterrevolutionary, and thus a potential victim of the state crackdown. Arbitrary arrests, imprisonments, and summary executions became common.

The Socialist Revolutionaries—known as the SRs—had also used assassinations and other forms of terrorism against the tsarist state since the first years of the 20th century. They turned their violent attention to the Communists during the civil war.

The SRs' radical ideology focused on the revolutionary potential of the peasants and the countryside. In late August 1918, one of them murdered Moisei Uritsky, the head of the Cheka in the capital. Hours later, another SR—a woman by the name of Fanny Kaplan—shot Vladimir Lenin three times as he emerged from a factory in Moscow. He was gravely wounded, but he survived, adding to his prestige among the public.

Propaganda

Resistance to the Bolsheviks stemmed at least in part from their thoroughness. The Bolsheviks aimed not merely for political change but also to renovate every aspect of life. This seemed quite threatening to ordinary Russians.

A key weapon for Lenin was propaganda. Soon after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks closed bourgeois newspapers, appropriated their presses, and seized more than 1,000 newspaper kiosks in cities and railroad stations across the country. The utility of newspapers was limited by the high levels of illiteracy in the Soviet state. Still, the Soviet government itself distributed a half-million newspapers each week during the civil war through its expropriated kiosks.

The new medium of radio afforded new propaganda possibilities. State-controlled radio broadcasting would begin in the early 1920s. Film offered further opportunities. All of these projects were overseen by the Bolshevik writer Anatoly Lunacharsky.

The Bolsheviks also erected dozens of new monuments to serve as visual aids to legitimize the revolution and educate the urban masses about their history. Early Soviet monuments also celebrated a diverse array of Russian and European radicals, philosophers, and artists, reflecting the Bolshevik conception of the revolution as an international workers' movement.



Legendary rebels and members of the intelligentsia were immortalized, as were the theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

The Bolsheviks realized the power in the names of public spaces, and Lenin believed that the naming process conveyed legitimacy and prestige. Long before the last battle of the civil war, streets, squares, buildings, and cities were renamed. Revolutionary milestones and values became landmarks of Soviet life.

As an example, the Soviets renamed two streets near the spot where Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881. These would now be known for the radical lovers, Sofia Perovskaya and Andrei Zhelyabov, leaders of the People's Will revolutionary group, who'd engineered the tsar's death in March of 1881.

Public Adoration

Public adoration was a visible way for citizens to demonstrate their loyalty to the Soviets and to the revolution in the midst of the civil war. Lenin himself now became the personification of the Soviet state. Public reverence for him revealed each individual's personal commitment to his values.

Lenin, in turn, responded to the public warmth with ever more of himself. He seemed to be everywhere at ceremonies in Moscow in November 1918. He oversaw parades, popped into theaters to make remarks, and unveiled monuments to the history of the revolution on its one-year anniversary. Lenin's participation in these ceremonies—so soon after nearly dying—affirmed his resilience and the robustness of the revolution.

Lenin and the Communist Party had realized that they needed to win the hearts and minds of the Soviet people in a very large way. This became a cultural battle the state fought on every front possible. Among the most elaborate public displays of the Soviets' triumph were public mass commemorations on Red Square. These celebrated important Soviet holidays like the October Revolution, May Day, and—at the conclusion of World War II—Victory Day.

The Cult of Lenin

Lenin recovered quickly from the attempt on his life in 1918, but his overall health declined in 1922 as he suffered the first in a series of strokes. By 1923, his condition no longer permitted public appearances. Over the course of the next year, Lenin's physical state deteriorated further. He was largely incapacitated, and unable to speak. Even though the extent of the Bolshevik leader's infirmity was hidden from the general public, his extended illness fueled the cult of Lenin: The less he was able to appear in public, the more he was publicly deified.

During this time, Lenin's words became requisite mantras at everything from Communist Party meetings to family gatherings and funerals. Further, as the Soviet state increasingly restricted the church and public religiosity, the cult of Lenin filled this devotional vacuum. Lenin's writings took on the force of dogma in the absence of now-outlawed scriptural texts.

Like Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great before him, Lenin was depicted as just and kind toward his people, and terrible and merciless towards those who dared exploit them. At the same time, unlike Ivan and Peter—who'd had to share the stage with the Russian Orthodox Church—Lenin was concurrently saint, martyr, prophet, and ruler. As a result, the Lenin cult became even more consuming than earlier ruler cults. It was a pervasive part of Soviet culture.



When Lenin at last died in January 1924, the nation engaged in a period of massive, collective, public mourning. Because millions of Russians had perished in the civil war and the ensuing famine of 1921, the scale—and frequency—of death didn't permit extended displays of grief and mourning for common citizens. Lenin's death was a mass exception. For three days in the bitter cold, more than a half-million people waited in long lines to pay their respects to the former Soviet leader, who now lay in state in Moscow.

Joseph Stalin, the man destined to be Lenin's successor, insisted that Lenin's body be embalmed and permanently placed on display in front of the Kremlin. A noted church architect designed a cube-like structure that infused elements of ancient mausoleums to house his remains.

Lenin lived on in propaganda, literature, culture, and history. His life habits epitomized what it meant to be a good Communist. His words became gospel. In addition, a Lenin naming frenzy began. Schools, farms, libraries, and the former capital of Petrograd now assumed his name, becoming Leningrad.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Corney, *Telling October*.

Gleason, *Bolshevik Culture*.

Rabinowitch, *Bolsheviks in Power*.

Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*.

Witkovsky and Fore, eds., *Revoliutsiia! Demonstratsiia!*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How were the new Soviet man and woman supposed to be different from Russians of the past?
2. How did everyday culture change with the Bolshevik Revolution?
3. How did a militarized culture and an inclination to employ violence take root in the early Soviet era?



LECTURE 18

THE ROARING TWENTIES, SOVIET STYLE

The Russian Revolution wasn't just about changing the country's political structure. Bolshevik revolutionaries also attacked the traditional religious, sexual, and social norms that had prevailed in imperial Russia up to 1917. They saw themselves as architects of the human mind. This lecture looks at changes they implemented in the late 1910s and the 1920s.

Literacy and Education

Early on, Lenin's government replaced the former Ministry of Culture with a new agency known as Narkompros, which is shorthand for the Commissariat of Education and Enlightenment. Under the direction of the Marxist revolutionary Anatoly Lunacharsky, Narkompros issued a formative directive in November 1917, signaling a desire to fight against ignorance and illiteracy.

Narkompros took over the administration of the nation's schools. It democratized admissions to the country's universities, and decreed that students shouldn't be expelled for non-payment of fees. The government also established literacy programs for adult workers and peasants.



Lenin believed that the continuing success of the revolution was dependent upon the enlightenment of the entire population, and most especially the young. Therefore, even with limited financial resources, the Soviet state invested heavily in education.

In 1918, Communist Party functionaries established the Young Communist League—the Komsomol—to further encourage the so-called enlightenment of Soviet youth. The Komsomol spread teachings among Soviet youth between the ages of 14 and 28. Its members also cultivated gardens, cleaned up streets, and distributed food.

Russian Communists saw religious belief and practice as indicative of unmodern and backward thinking. Komsomol members—as leading representatives of the new modern Soviet youth—took an active role in public campaigns against religion. They ridiculed religious belief and mocked those who continued to harbor faith in God.

Soviet Women

Soviet women were also a priority for a makeover according to Bolshevik ideals. To a certain extent, the Soviets believed that the revolution would accomplish this naturally. In the first decade after the 1917 revolution, it certainly looked as if Soviet women were destined for more equitable treatment.

The 1918 Soviet constitution formalized women's legal equality. The family code as spelled out in the constitution made marriage a civil institution, legalized divorce, established alimony for both spouses, and abolished the legal distinctions of legitimacy and illegitimacy. All of this was seen as beneficial to women.

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

A leading proponent for women's emancipation was Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952), a Marxist and feminist who believed that women's rights were closely related to workers' rights. Kollontai was a gifted writer and theorist who served as the first commissar of social welfare in Lenin's government.



The ease of terminating a marriage under the Soviet regime caused divorce rates to skyrocket. By the mid-1920s, the Soviet Union had the highest divorce rate in Europe. This often brought unintended financial complications for Soviet women, whose lower wages couldn't make up for the lost financial support of their better-paid husbands. This, in turn, led to unanticipated social consequences for the country—like rising rates of prostitution and a rapidly expanding number of abandoned children.

Although the state had decreed women the equals of men—politically and legally—women continued to confront sexist discrimination on the job, in their homes, and even in the Communist Party itself. By the end of the decade, women still accounted for less than 15 percent of the Communist Party's membership. This mattered because membership in the party was increasingly the conduit for professional and educational advancement.

The Soviet state drafted protective labor laws for women and mandated pregnancy leave. The Communist Party also championed nurseries and kindergartens to care for the youngest Soviets and rear them according to socialist principles. However, the state pledged to provide more services to aid families' lives than it was able to. Women were left to fill the void. Consequently, it's hard to argue that women's lives were substantially eased during the first few decades of Soviet rule.



Religion

The Russian Orthodox Church also came under new pressure. Almost immediately after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks lobbed the first in a series of blows against all houses of religion. The Soviets abandoned the Julian calendar favored by the church, replacing it with the Gregorian calendar. The government decreed the separation of church and state and confiscated church property. It also substituted church holidays with revolutionary ones.



The patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Tikhon, complained that under Soviet rule, churches were looted and desecrated. He led a counter-assault, calling on clergy to condemn revolutionary decrees and resist the appropriation of church property.

The Soviets' anti-religion campaign affected many groups of faith, including Jews, Muslims, and Catholics, as well as orthodox Christians. Tension reached new levels of intensity with the breakout of famine in 1921. The famine killed several million Soviet citizens.

As leader of the state, Lenin now decided to take advantage of the situation and to use the famine against the church. Needing currency to buy grain from abroad, he demanded that the church turn over its gold, silver, and gems. When church officials resisted, Lenin used their reluctance to clamp down. He closed churches, arrested and even shot members of the clergy, and publicly impugned the church as a greedy organization, insensitive to the plight of the people.

The USSR

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR, was formed in 1924 through the combination of the Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republics. Its enormous diversity fed the government's compulsion to craft a new culture as a way of unifying the country.

About half of the USSR's population was neither ethnically Russian nor Russian orthodox. In such a diverse country, a common identity and affinity didn't exist. It needed to be created. In 1923, the Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky acknowledged as much.

Artistic Changes

The most popular elements of the new revolutionary culture modified key elements of Russia's cultural past to fit revolutionary purposes. For example, the pervasive use of red in revolutionary iconography symbolized the blood of the martyrs of the October Revolution, just as red had previously symbolized the martyrdom of orthodox martyrs in religious icons.

Old popular folk songs were refitted with new lyrics after the October Revolution. Popular novels and short stories—especially wildly popular detective stories—began to feature a telltale blend of adventure, parody, and propaganda, featuring revolutionary and Communist heroes.

Other artistic innovations were completely new and consciously rejected cultural elements from the past. Much of this could be labeled futurist. Futurist artists included writers, poets, sculptors, painters, composers, directors, or architects. Whatever medium they worked in, the futurists championed experimental forms, urban technology, and engagement with politics.

One of the most important developments in the visual arts during this period was known as Constructivism. It combined mechanical objects into abstract forms. Constructivists viewed artists as engineers and used geometric forms to construct a new, modern artistic world. The style developed out of popular fascination with technology, industry, and construction materials.

An important example of Constructivism comes from the Russian theater, where an artistic fascination with machinery and the cult of technology transformed theatrical sets. A prime example of this was seen in the 1922 production of a Belgian romantic farce, *The Magnificent Cuckold*. This production allowed the influential Russian producer, director, and actor Vsevolod Meyerhold to reimagine the stage.



With a functional set designed by another Russian avant-gardist—the female artist Liubov Popova—the play privileged movement over language. Popova's set required actors, dressed in workers' overalls, to constantly negotiate ramps, ladders and furniture, like circus performers. The result was inventive and kinetic.

Film

During the 1920s, pre-revolutionary Russia was depicted in film as a starkly polarized and exploitative country. The privileged classes appeared with few redeeming qualities, whereas ordinary workers came across as authentic and sincere.



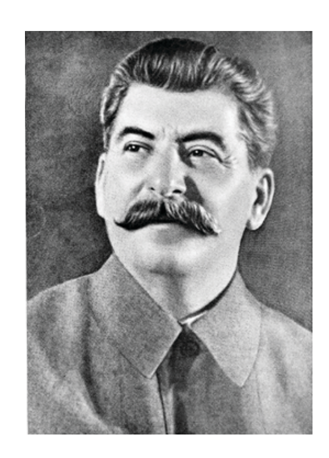
The Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein was a master of this approach. In early works such as *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin*, and *October*, Eisenstein celebrated the power of the people's revolutionary energy and the virtue of the masses. Many of his productions were cinematic spectacles made to celebrate revolutionary anniversaries.

In *October*, the villains are clearly defined with the Romanov autocracy, the post-tsarist provisional government, its leader Alexander Kerensky, the bourgeoisie, and the church. The Bolsheviks are the obvious heroes of the story. This film celebrated a decade of Soviet rule and solidified the primacy of the revolution in Russian—that is, Soviet—culture. It also represented a disturbing political shift.

Early on, artists had generally celebrated the revolution by venerating the masses. This is clearly on display in the 1920 film *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, coinciding with the third anniversary of the revolution. In it, thousands of residents of the former St. Petersburg, renamed Petrograd in 1914, became actors playing the role of revolutionary mobs wresting control of the government and the Winter Palace in 1917.

During the first years of the revolution, anything had seemed possible—whether in politics, economics, or culture. But as the 1920s advanced, the space for utopian imaginings—and creative experimentation—became increasingly constricted.

In Eisenstein's *October*, the heroic emphasis shifted. Lenin and the Bolsheviks became intrinsic to the narrative. Although the escalating veneration of the Communist Party and its leadership in 1927 still allowed for input from the people, as can be seen through Eisenstein's scenes depicting the masses clamoring for revolutionary change, the room for a populace apart from the party and its leadership would soon be dramatically curtailed.



Once Joseph Stalin assumed power in 1929 and had the ability to craft his own sense of revolution and revolutionary morality, artistic experimentation and individualism didn't just become frowned upon. Stalin would deem them downright dangerous to the revolution.

SUGGESTED READINGS

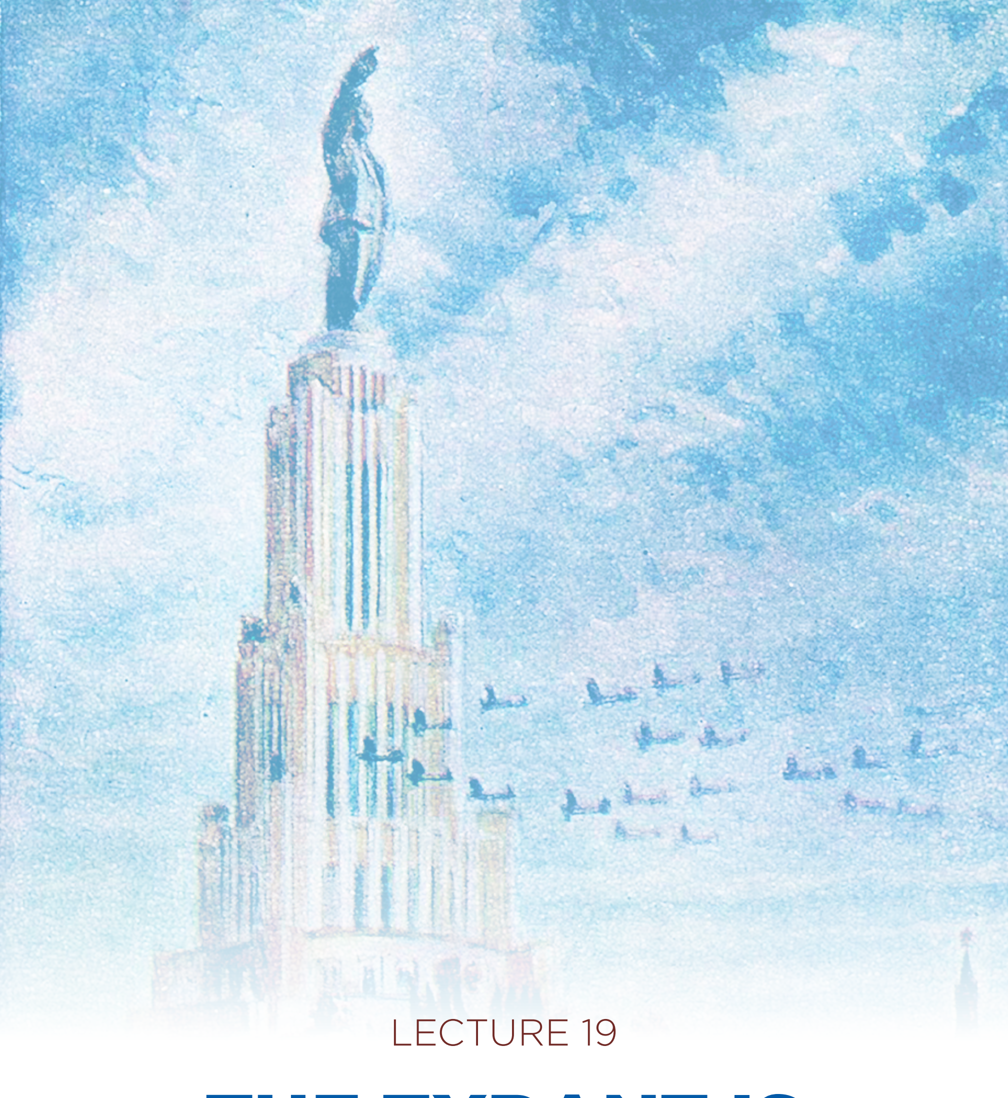
Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*.

Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*

Witkovsky and Fore, eds., *Revoliutsiia! Demonstratsiia!*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Did the Soviets fully reject religion and its influence, or did they appropriate and remake certain elements of Russian religious culture?
2. How much did gender relations change in the early Soviet period?
3. To what extent did the popular culture of the past affect Soviet culture in the 1920s?



LECTURE 19

THE TYRANT IS A MOVIE BUFF: STALINISM

In the years after Vladimir Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin consolidated power by building political alliances against his rivals and then turning against his allies as well. He did so by identifying himself with Lenin as much as possible. Furthermore, by harnessing power as the general secretary of the Communist Party and courting a close relationship with the Soviet secret political police, Stalin accumulated a loyal body of his own followers and a mechanism for discrediting challengers. His efforts had a deep impact on Russian culture, which this lecture shows.

Industrial Efforts

By the time the 1920s came to a close, the Soviet Union stood essentially weak and isolated. Russian agriculture had recovered to its pre–World War I levels, but the country's industrial base lagged far behind that of the developed world. The regime now allocated 86 percent of state economic investment for heavy industry through the state economic planning commission, known as Gosplan. In the world's first planned economy, the goal was to raise output in the heavy industrial sector by 330 percent over the next few years.

By 1932, that objective was largely met. One problem, however, was that such a concentration of investment allowed for next to no investment in other sectors of the economy. Shortages of consumer goods became the norm. Stalin asked his people to make temporary sacrifices for the good of the nation. Still, the Stalinist state lurched from one potential emergency to another. Patriotic sacrifice became a fundamental element of Soviet life.



To crave goods was portrayed as negative. To be a good Soviet entailed making due with little. Citizens were expected to aspire to create Communism, not to concern themselves with consumerism and luxuries. Furthermore, the state and party continually reaffirmed that the triumph of Communism needed to be accomplished collectively.

THE LEGEND OF ALEXEI STAKHANOV

Soviet citizens were called upon to be heroes through their labor. Highly productive workers became the rock stars of the age. Take, for example, Alexei Stakhanov, a coal miner who allegedly mined 102 tons during one six-hour shift. This was 14 times his quota. Stakhanov became a national celebrity. He was feted and rewarded. His name gave rise to a new term—*Stakhanovite*—describing extremely hard-working, productive Soviets.

In order to produce a large enough supply of grain to feed an exploding number of industrial workers, Stalin initiated the collectivization of agriculture. Collectivization pulled Russian peasants off individual farms and gathered them on large state and collective ones. Implements and assignments were shared. The state set quotas and then oversaw distribution. Collective farmers realized the fruits of their efforts only after production quotas determined by Gosplan were met.

Russian peasants balked at collectivization. However, officials labeled any such resistance class struggle. Peasant households that objected to having their property and livestock confiscated were called *kulaks*—that is, rich peasants who amassed their wealth through the exploitation of others.



To be termed a kulak was disastrous. Kulak families were arrested, and exiled to penal colonies—called *gulags*—or even executed as class enemies. The scope of *dekulakization* was enormous. Conservatively, 2 million peasants were deported to remote areas of Siberia and Central Asia by 1933. Through the ruthless suppression of resistance, some 83 percent of peasant households were collectivized by the mid-1930s. The figure was nearly 100 percent in grain-growing areas like Ukraine.

Famine

In 1932, grain production failed to match the Gosplan target. Two regions that failed most conspicuously were Ukraine and areas within the North Caucasus. Because Soviet law required that grain from collective farms could be distributed to members only after quotas had been met, these farmers were now denied a share of their harvests. In addition, Stalin interpreted the failure as political resistance. He blacklisted entire villages and collective farms. These areas were cut off from state trade and credit. Essentially, they were consigned to starve.

A disproportionate number of the 5–7 million Soviets who died in the 1932–1933 famine lived in Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus—an area that produced more grain than any other part of the Soviet Union, even during bad times. As a result, Ukraine lost more than one-quarter of its population while the government continued to export grain from the region.

Secret Police

The Soviet secret police—the Joint State Political Directorate, known by its initials as the OGPU—began to generate a steady supply of cheap labor for the Soviets' industrialization goals, as would its successor, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD.

There was an explosion in the number of forced-labor camps and penal labor colonies from the beginning of Stalin's regime to the mid-1930s. By the start of World War II, evidence shows that more than 1.5 million Soviets labored in gulags and police-run prisons.

Celebrating Stalin

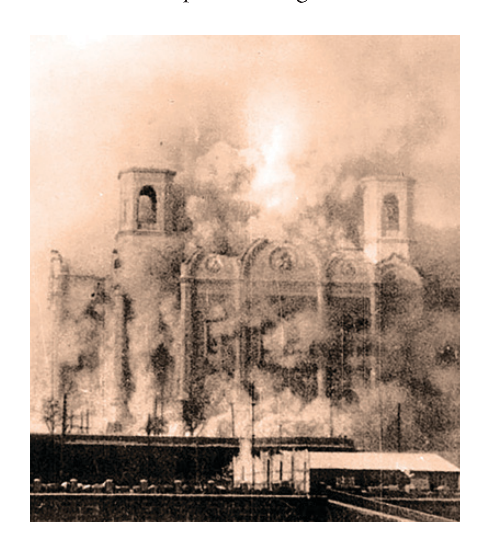
Within the Soviet environment, Soviet citizens lived cautiously. Given their one-party system and regulated elections, one manner in which Soviet citizens could demonstrate their allegiance to the state and regime was by taking part in public demonstrations of support for the new patriotic culture. This was done through parades, festivals, and public celebrations. May Day and the anniversary of the October Revolution were among the biggest occasions. Participants would applaud the regime's achievements—and, of course, Stalin.



There was nothing spontaneous about these public displays. Instead, they were the product of strict central planning and disciplined choreography. Participation and enthusiasm were expected.

Stalin versus Religion

As Stalin solidified control, he stoked public hostility towards the Russian Orthodox Church. Bankrupting the authority of the church went hand-in-hand with appropriating its property and possessions. Stripping church buildings of their valuables allowed the state to put the religious structures to secular purposes. Many simply served as warehouses in the countryside. Some more prominent and visible churches were put to even more political use.



Stalin also made it illegal for religious organizations to engage in philanthropic or educational ventures. By the end of the 1930s, only 500 of the 50,000 Russians Orthodox churches that had existed when the Soviets came to power remained open.

The Moscow Metro

One of the most spectacular accomplishments of the Stalinist regime was the construction of the Moscow metro. Still one of the most efficient subway systems in the world, it is also arguably the most beautiful. The Soviets began building the Moscow metro in the early 1930s. It was intended to efficiently bring workers to their jobs and accommodate the rapidly expanding population tied to the rapid industrialization envisioned by the regime's five-year plans.

In just three years, the population of Moscow increased by 50 percent. The metro was needed to accommodate to this growth. In addition to being a transportation system of the future, it was also an artistic masterpiece—a public museum in which art moved from the private into the public arena, and highlighted revolutionary history and accomplishments. The state also presented the opportunity for Soviet youth to work building the metro.

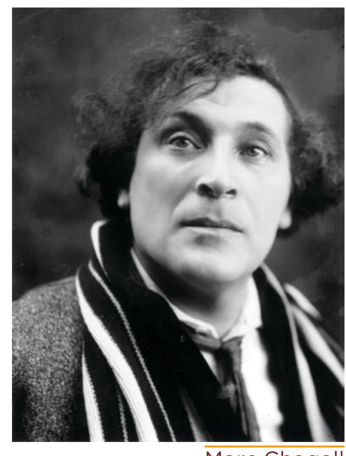
Socialist Realism

An art style known as socialist realism flourished during the Stalinist era. Socialist realism advanced the primacy of content and message over style. It was supposed to present the potential of socialism and inspire Soviet citizens to work toward it.

The dark underbelly of life was erased and colored over in pastel, soft depictions. For example, in Sergei Gerasimov's 1937 painting *Kolhoz Celebrates the Harvest*, the viewer sees no signs of famine or repression. Instead, the painting depicts a collective farm feast, with hunger, dirt, and conflict expunged.

Socialist realism infected every artistic field. It was more than a trend; it was a directive. As a result, this was not a golden age of Russian or Soviet elite culture. Oil paintings of optimistic Soviets building a better technological future dominated the visual arts, while stories with titles like *How the Steel was Tempered* set the new literary standard.

Artists who didn't conform to socialist realism did better to emigrate—or remain in exile—rather than to attempt to make a reputation in the Soviet Union. Among these were the Belorussian modernist painter Marc Chagall, who lived and worked in France, and the Russian abstract painter Vasily Kandinsky, who lived and worked in Germany and France.



Marc Chagall

Enemies Within

Many of the men and women who helped to build the contours of socialism in the early Soviet period didn't survive to see it reach maturity. In the civil war period through the early 1920s, Vladimir Lenin had turned against non-Communist political opponents. Beginning in the mid-1930s, Stalin sought out enemies within his own party.

The Leningrad Communist Party chief Sergei Kirov was murdered in his offices, almost certainly on Stalin's orders. That began a purge of the party that was driven by Stalin's paranoia and determination to be rid of anyone who might pose a threat to his own power.

By the end of the 1930s, most of the old Bolsheviks who'd helped create the Soviet revolution were dead, imprisoned, or in exile—except for Stalin, who enjoyed dictatorial control. While he tinkered with the direction Soviet culture would take, his period of terror killed hundreds of thousands of loyal Communists in the span of just a few years.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*.

Slezkine, *The House of Government*.

Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*.

Von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. If Stalin was a tyrant, why was he so interested in public displays of loyalty to the Soviet state?
2. How did the remaking of the urban landscape reflect Soviet priorities? To what extent did it help to influence everyday culture and the political ideas of the Soviet people?
3. What was socialist realism? Was it culturally influential? Was it politically influential?



LECTURE 20

THE SOVIETS' GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

By the time World War II came to a close, the Soviets lost 27 million men, women, and children out of a total population of 200 million. This lecture examines Soviet life during World War II, a period the Russians refer to as the Great Patriotic War.

Hitler's Motivations



Nazi leader Adolf Hitler equated Bolshevism with Jewish influence. The presence of a few Russian Jews within the Bolshevik leadership was enough to convince the German leader of an international Jewish-Communist conspiracy—one that existed only in his own mind. Nevertheless, Hitler saw Jews and Communists alike as existential threats to the German race and nation.

Beyond his racist delusions, Hitler fixated on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for geopolitical and economic reasons. His quest for economic self-sufficiency for the German people focused on European Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Poland as territory for Germany. Because Hitler viewed the Slavic people of Eastern Europe as racially inferior to his Aryans, he aspired to colonize the territory for Germany's benefit and to enslave the Slavs or drive them further eastward.

Regardless of Hitler's views, on August 23, 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact. The pact stipulated that should either be involved in a war over the next 10 years, the other would stay neutral. The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression pact was also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact for the two foreign ministers who negotiated it (including the German Joachim von Ribbentrop).


The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression pact

It enabled Hitler's armed forces to invade Poland on September 1, 1939, without fear that the Soviets would attack from the east. Two days later, Britain and France demonstrated that the time of appeasement had come to a necessary end. World War II had begun.

Early in the War

While the Soviets remained on the sidelines of the larger conflict, at least for now, a secret protocol in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact gave eastern Poland to the Soviets. It also recognized Soviet interests in Finland, much of the Baltic States, and in Bessarabia—then part of Romania. Soviet armies moved into eastern Poland. In November 1939, they invaded Finland. By the summer of 1940, the Baltics, too, were incorporated into the USSR.

As Nazi armies swiftly conquered much of Europe, it probably seemed to Stalin that his neutrality pact with Hitler was a stroke of genius. However, British resistance unexpectedly colored the Soviets' fate. Hitler became convinced that the British fought in hopes that the Soviet Union would enter the war on Britain's side. As a result, Germany made plans to invade the Soviet Union itself. Hitler believed that he could achieve his colonial aspirations in the east by conquering—and occupying—the western parts of the Soviet Union. At the same time, he would dispel any lingering British hopes about obtaining Soviet assistance.

The German plan, Operation Barbarossa, got under way in the early morning hours of June 22, 1941. When the Germans invaded, most Soviet citizens would have expected guidance, inspiration, and hope from their leader. However, for days after the German invasion, Stalin remained silent.





Vyacheslav Molotov

Instead, it was the foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, who delivered the news that the country was at war, in a radio broadcast. Molotov's address set the stage for the patriotic dimensions that would define the culture of the war. He invoked the victorious patriotic war against the Napoleonic invaders in 1812 as a reassurance to the Soviet people that victory could, and would, be theirs.

The party newspaper, *Pravda*, now took to describing the conflict with Germany as the "patriotic war." Like Molotov's radio pronouncement, state propaganda wasn't a defense of socialism. Instead, it called on citizens to defend the motherland. A valiant defense was necessary, as Hitler's generals organized a three-pronged attack against Moscow, Leningrad, Ukraine, and the Caucasus.

Stalin finally gave a speech in Moscow on November 7, 1941. With Nazi Germany threatening to destroy the country, Stalin used language invoking fraternity and solidarity to imply that the struggle against Hitler was one in which all Russians—from the exalted leader to the lowliest peasants—needed to fight together.

German and Soviet Advances

For a while, it looked like the Soviet Union would quickly succumb to the Nazi onslaught. In the autumn of 1941, German forces advanced more than 1,000 kilometers. German officers could see the golden domes of the Kremlin through their field glasses. The city of Leningrad was under siege, and Kiev had fallen.

However, Soviet forces successfully defended Moscow and imposed extraordinary losses on the Nazis, who now began to experience delays they could ill afford. On December 6, 1941, the first Soviet counteroffensive began. It would take another two years of brutal fighting, but—from the summer of 1943 on—it was the Soviets who took the initiative.

Despite the damage they inflicted on the Germans, the toll the Soviets paid was enormous. Almost one out of every seven Soviet citizens lost their lives. These were not merely military deaths. In fact, the civilian casualties were even greater than the military ones.

THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD

The Germans blockaded Leningrad for more than 900 days between September 1941 and January 1944. During that time, residents—without much in the way of fuel or firewood—burned furniture, documents, love letters, and cherished photographs for warmth and cooking fuel. Official rations were insufficient, and many people starved or froze to death. By the end of the siege, between 850,000 and 1,000,000 civilians of Leningrad died.



Three men burying victims of Leningrad's siege in 1942

Film

In such dire times, the Soviet people needed to find a source of inspiration. Stalin and many other Soviet leaders believed that the country's film industry could fill that niche. The Soviet government went to great lengths to protect its moviemakers, and even evacuated film studios to towns in the interior of the USSR.

Several of Stalin's biographers note that the Soviet leader had a particular affinity for the 16th-century tsar Ivan the Terrible (also known as Ivan IV). In late 1940 or early 1941, the studio Mosfilm engaged the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein to write and direct a film celebrating the life of Ivan IV. Eisenstein was still writing it when the Germans invaded.

He finished the production in Kazakhstan. The composer Sergei Prokofiev joined him there. Prokofiev's score used Russian folk songs, liturgical music, and epic choral works. The actor Nikolai Cherkasov (1903–1966) served as leading man.

The first part of this two-part film, *Ivan the Terrible*, debuted in 1944 to great acclaim. The depiction of a strong leader who defended his country from a foreign threat and vanquished his domestic enemies resonated with Stalin. However, the second part, completed in 1946, showed the Russian tsar as a more conflicted character and did not pass muster with the Soviet dictator. Stalin derided the work. It was quickly locked away and not shown publicly until 1958, by which point both Stalin and the filmmaker had died.

While Stalin cultivated in film the prominence of the great men of Russian history, women had a role to play as well. This was especially the case in screen depictions of female partisans. For example, the 1943 film *She Defends the Motherland* depicts the heroine Pasha pulled from her idyllic pre-war life, after the brutal murder of her family by the Germans. Calm, confident, and willing to sacrifice herself, Pasha exacts revenge while inspiring a band of partisans to fight at all costs.

Poetry and Radio



Other artists also found creative voices in the midst of war and national turmoil. Anna Akhmatova, one of Russia's great poets, focused on translation work during the 1930s as a means of self-preservation amid Stalinist repression.

However, the Great Patriotic War unlocked her voice. In the 1942 poem "Courage," Akhmatova intertwines sacrifice, resilience, and cultural patriotism. She invokes Russian nationalism, and vows that she and her compatriots would defend their language and culture against the German invaders. Her expression of defiance was meant to arouse her fellow Soviets to follow her example.

Poets and dramatists alike reached large numbers of the public through the radio. In Leningrad, during the brutal years of the German blockade, radio played an especially important role. The Soviet poet, playwright, and journalist Olga Berggolts became a model of perseverance for the nation. In her poem "Conversation with a Neighbor," the poet describes the citizens of Leningrad as suffering from insufficient bread rations, with frayed nerves brought on by protracted air-raid alerts.



She urges her fellow Leningraders to hang on and resist. The radio allowed her to reach a greater percentage of her fellow Soviets than she ever previously imagined.

War and Religion

Stalin saw a benefit in re-forging a connection between the Russian state and the Russian church as 1943 progressed. To that end, he permitted the Russian Orthodox Church to reopen a limited number of churches and schools, and to elect a new patriarch. In turn, the newly elected patriarch, Sergius, acknowledged Stalin to be the divinely anointed ruler of the Soviet state.

This seemingly greater cultural openness had a dark underbelly. As the Russian nation became the surrogate nation for a supranational Soviet man, ethnicities and faiths became secondary. In cases like the Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and Chechens, they were persecuted en masse.

After the War

In the decade that followed the war, the Soviet triumph over Nazism became synonymous with Stalin's supposed genius. Only heroic depictions of the war reached the public domain. The massive number of deaths and hardships on the home front were expunged from the public record for decades. Military memoirs were almost entirely banned.

It would take the death of Stalin for the Soviet government—and people—to rediscover an official record of the war and to have an opportunity to collectively mourn the lives lost. When that happened, the Great Patriotic War was born anew.



The Monument of the Leningrad Blockade

The war became an experience that not only defined a generation, but also the nation: not the Soviet nation, per se, but rather Mother Russia. Tied to monumental victories of the past, the Great Patriotic War became viewed as a victory won not by an individual leader, but by the Russian people for their motherland.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Akhmatova, *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova*.

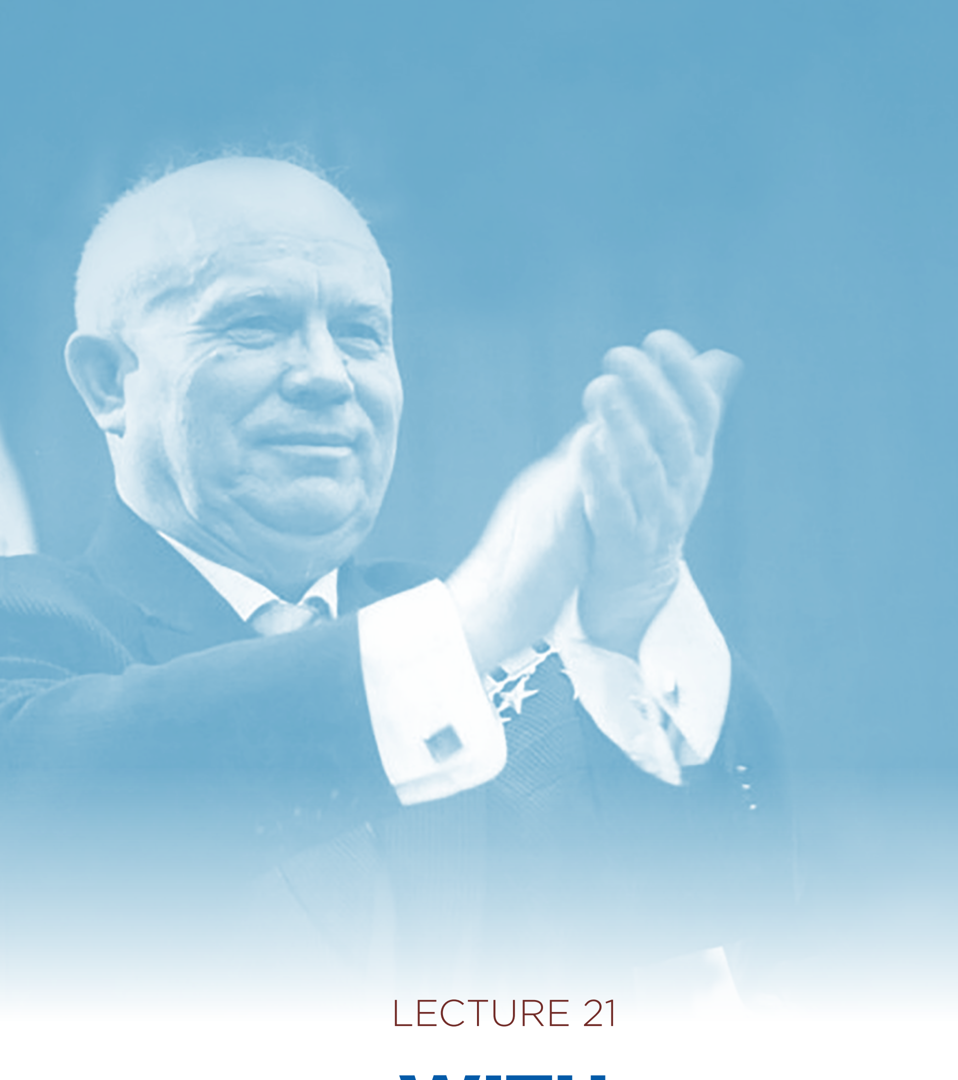
Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995*.

Rzhevsky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*.

Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do the Soviets call World War II the Great Patriotic War?
2. How did the concept of nationalism in the Soviet Union evolve over the course of the war?
3. What role did art and culture play in the successful Soviet battle against the Nazis?



LECTURE 21

WITH KHRUSHCHEV, THE CULTURAL THAW

The Soviet premier Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (1894–1971) led the Soviet Union in the decade after Joseph Stalin's death, from 1953 until October 1964. Ultimately, he was forced to resign amid rising tensions with China and food shortages within the USSR. This was also two years after a confrontation with the United States culminated in the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. This lecture looks at his rise to power and his time in charge of the Soviet Union.

After the War

World War II ended with Hitler's defeat, and the victors rejoiced. These years would mark the apex of Stalin's personality cult. However, even though the Soviet Union had emerged from the war as a global superpower, much of the country lay in ruin. One-third of its wealth was lost in the war. Thousands of towns lay in ruins.



Under Stalin's strategy to restore the nation—and meet the United States in the coming Cold War—he first resolved to rebuild economically. This meant instituting the fourth five-year plan of the Stalin years: this one in 1946, after the first in 1928.

For typical Soviet citizens, the strategy meant delaying any relief from wartime privations. Instead, the government would continue to stress the need for temporary hardships and sacrifice in order to rebuild the country and face the capitalist American superpower. Rationing persisted. Shortages remained. The situation worsened at the end of 1946, when a drought led to poor harvests and government mismanagement compounded the crisis. The ensuing famine cost up to 2 million lives.



Meanwhile, the Stalin ally Andrei Zhdanov became the state's chief propagandist. He was the cultural and ideological watchdog of the post-war period, and stressed that culture could never be freed from politics. The Communist Party needed to dominate culture and art. Plays by Western writers were purged from theatrical repertoires. Pessimism was officially banned. Theaters staged crude melodramas demonizing America.

Soviet architects rebuilt the country's main cities with grandiose, monumental structures, purposefully trying to belie the country's financial straits. Paradoxically, Stalin and Zhdanov endeavored to grandstand for foreigners at the same time as they rabidly guarded against foreign influence.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism found expressive license at the hands of Stalin and Zhdanov under the guise of anti-cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism referred generally to Western sympathies. Anti-cosmopolitan was initially equated with Soviet patriotism. However, the term came to be a euphemism for anti-Semitism, because during the late Stalin years, cosmopolitans were understood to be principally Jewish academics and intellectuals.

One of the most egregious examples of anti-Semitic repression was the murder of the great Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels (1890–1948). He had spent much of the war raising money for the Soviet cause. However, Stalin angrily denounced him at a meeting in 1948. Three days later, Mikhoels was lured to a meeting and killed by the NKVD—the secret police.

After Stalin



Joseph Stalin died on March 5, 1953. Within a few months of Stalin's passing, it became clear that change was afoot. Lavrenty Beria, the head of the NKVD, fell from grace. He did so at the hands of the Soviet premier Georgii Malenkov and the general secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev. Arrested in June, Beria was executed for treason in December 1953. For the next two years, Khrushchev, Malenkov, and foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov ruled as a triumvirate, until Khrushchev outmaneuvered his allies and reigned supreme.

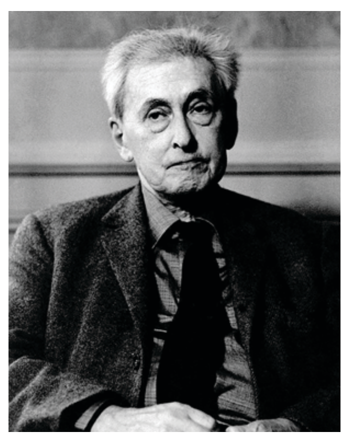
The new Soviet leadership saw value in reducing tensions with the West. With Stalin gone and a new administration in the United States under President Dwight Eisenhower, the Soviets now pursued a policy of peaceful coexistence. This didn't mean that all conflict would disappear. Instead, the basic premise was that Communism and capitalism could peacefully coexist without bringing civilization to a bloody—or nuclear—end.

Ratcheting down militaristic rhetoric with the United States—and with the recently formed North Atlantic Treaty Organization—could free up funds to invest in improving Soviet living standards. After decades of asking the Soviet people to make one sacrifice after another, this seemed a prudent course.

Emblematic of the new course was the amnesty of political prisoners, declared within weeks of Stalin's death. Even before the fall from grace of NKVD chief Beria, more than 2 million prisoners were released from prison and the gulag. Over the next few years, roughly 600,000 of them were officially rehabilitated, meaning they were declared innocent of the crimes of which they originally had been charged.

Critical Reflection

As the narrative of guilt pronounced during the Stalinist period came to be questioned, critical reflection was given greater license. In literature, more than any other area, writers confronted the nation's past. This entailed challenging the state-imposed rubric of socialist realism and the party's version of history and life.



Writers like Ilia Ehrenburg (1891–1967) advocated for artistic self-expression, an example being Ehrenburg's 1954 novel *The Thaw*. Unlike earlier periods, when advocacy for artistic voice would have led to a writer's censure or arrest, Ehrenburg's conception of a cultural thaw resonated.

Writers and poets increasingly criticized the formulaic parameters and creative emptiness that defined the literature from the previous decade. This tendency found reinforcement at the highest levels of the government. In February 1956, Khrushchev delivered a scathing speech condemning Stalin for purges of innocent Communists, for his mishandling of the early stages of World War II, and for his creation of a cult of personality that glorified his person over the socialist principles of the people.

Although intended for Communist Party ears only, the details of Khrushchev's speech quickly leaked. His criticism of Stalin opened the cultural floodgates and political possibilities.

One literary figure who came to be published once again was the poet Anna Akhmatova. She had lost a husband to a firing squad and a son to the gulag—at least for a time. She wrote the tragic elegy *Requiem* between 1935 and 1961 and persuaded friends to commit the lines to memory. Paper copies were not retained. It's likely that *Requiem* would have died along with the author's friends were it not for the increased security that came from de-Stalinization and the thaw.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Russian novelist Boris Pasternak interpreted Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin as a sign that the time had come to publish a novel he'd worked on for decades. His final novel explored the experiences of an intellectual doctor and poet named Iurii Zhivago during the tumultuous years of war and revolution.

In the novel, the revolution of 1917 comes across as blemished and the civil war that followed it as disastrous. In this way—and with the benefit of hindsight—Pasternak wrestled with the failed promises of the Soviet era. With Nikita Khrushchev sanctioning a process of de-Stalinization for the country, Pasternak submitted the unpublished manuscript to the literary journal *Novyi Mir*.

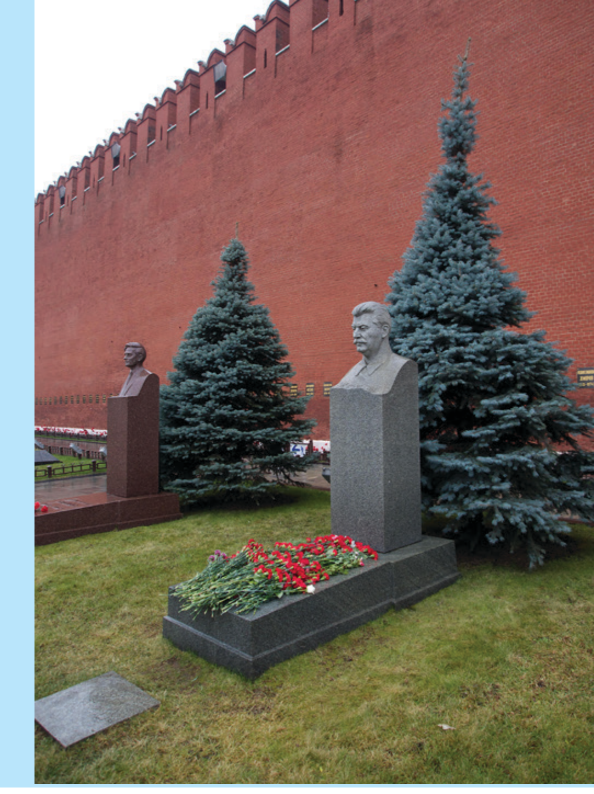
The journal rejected it, citing Pasternak's "non-acceptance of the socialist revolution." De-Stalinization—and the thaw—still had their limits.

Next, the author secretly passed the manuscript to an Italian publisher, who published it in 1957 as *Dr. Zhivago*. The next year, Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. After initially expressing his delight and gratitude, Pasternak turned down the honor. With no wish to emigrate, and the Soviet government determined in its hostility towards the novel, the regime could all too easily prevent Pasternak from writing and reduce the material niceties he enjoyed as a respected Soviet artist.

In spite of his rejection of the award, the Writers' Union of the USSR still expelled Pasternak. Many Soviets called for him to be forcibly kicked out of the country, or worse. Pasternak penned a personal letter to Khrushchev, asking to remain. He was permitted to stay, but he became an outcast.

STALIN'S BODY

Under cover of darkness in autumn 1961, Communist Party leaders removed Stalin's body from its privileged place next to Lenin and buried it at the outer edge of the Kremlin wall. Shrouded by a large white tarp, masons returned to the tomb and erased Stalin's name from the entryway. With this, the past was rewritten to facilitate the political machinations of the present. However, Stalin's legacy proved more difficult to erase than his name on Lenin's tomb.



Soviet Politics

Soviet politics remained deeply complicated during the years of the thaw. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 had wide ramifications. It inspired the Hungarian Revolution—a popular revolt against its Stalinist government—in the fall of 1956. Khrushchev responded with tanks. Thousands died, and tens of thousands more fled.

The Khrushchev years of peaceful coexistence also fostered diplomatic summits between American presidents and Soviet premiers. However, the limits were evident time and again, as when Khrushchev angrily waved his shoe during a United Nations plenary meeting in October 1960 and when he sanctioned the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

Conclusion

The thaw was about exorcising the ghost of Joseph Stalin, while also bearing witness to his victims. This recognition brought Khrushchev legitimacy. Yet as Boris Pasternak and others discovered, the thaw had its limits. Although the crimes of Joseph Stalin could be explored, the failings of the revolution could not—at least not yet.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*.

Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*.

Rzhevsky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did Soviet authors, poets, musicians, and artists fare in the years that immediately followed the Great Patriotic War? Why did some artists who experienced opportunities during the war years see a dramatic reversal of fortunes in the late Stalinist period?
2. What prompted Nikita Khrushchev to liberalize cultural policies? What determined the limits to this cultural thaw?
3. Did Stalinism continue to have any influence on Soviet culture even after Khrushchev initiated a policy of de-Stalinization?



LECTURE 22

SOVIET *BYT*: SHARED KITCHEN, STOVE, AND BATH

When the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, the social order was upended to eliminate old systems of privilege. Vladimir Lenin and the Communist Party also strove to reconfigure something even more elemental. They aimed to change what Russians call *byt*—in essence, the Russian way of life. Byt extends beyond the public/civil self into individuals' private lives and their personal relations.

To give a sense of how everyday existence changed under the Bolshevik vision, this lecture turns to life after World War II and after the death of Joseph Stalin. The lecture examines Soviet byt during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods—from 1953 through the 1970s.

Urbanization

One of the most fundamental ways that the Soviet system changed the country was through dramatic, accelerated urbanization. At the time of the October Revolution in 1917, about 80 percent of the Russian population had lived in rural villages and towns. By the mid-1960s, fully two-thirds of Soviet citizens lived in cities. By the end of the 1980s, the percentage of urban residents approximated the level of rural dwellers prior to the revolution.

The Communist Party accomplished this feat—moving the bulk of the population from village to city—through a series of five-year plans and hurried industrialization. However, until the late 1950s, the Soviet government failed to prioritize housing for its people. This meant that existing urban housing stocks needed to accommodate substantially more people.

The first measure the Soviets took was to expropriate space from the former Russian nobility and bourgeoisie and make it available to the new urban masses. Contending that imperial elites had obtained their riches through the exploitation of the working class, the Soviets saw no reason now to let them retain their ill-gotten gains. Space was requisitioned in opulent urban townhomes and mansions. The former owners usually could keep one room for themselves, but the rest of the house became living space for a host of new inhabitants.

Over the next decade, the government came to essentially own and control the housing stock. Up through the 1970s, most urban families in communal apartments lived in a single room where they endured an acute lack of privacy. A flat that previously had housed a family now housed men, women, and families who were strangers.

Tenants didn't get to choose where they lived, nor with whom they shared space. The housing authorities determined that. Housing committees in the apartment buildings monitored it. If a family's situation changed—through marriage, divorce, birth, or death—the space to which they were entitled could be recalculated.

Gaining more space or trying to move closer to one's place of work entailed getting on the housing list. Even making it onto the list was a feat. People had to show a discernible need.

Factories and workplaces often had their own housing stock that they could dole out to workers. There was great diversity in the quality of the living space that workplaces and institutions had access to. Its distribution was determined by the prestige of the worker involved.

HARSH HOUSING

The rudimentary state of household utilities in Soviet cities made life even more challenging. As late as 1959, less than a third of urban Soviets had indoor plumbing. Less than a quarter had central heating. Even when hot water was available, it was sparse.



Mass Housing



One of the most decisive reforms that the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev instituted upon taking power in 1953 was a mass housing program. A private apartment for each Soviet family had been declared a social goal as early as the 1930s, but it was only through Khrushchev's program that the state began to follow through.

In the five-year plan beginning in 1956, state investment in housing construction reached an all-time high of 23.5 percent of total capital investment. Between 1950 and 1965, the urban housing stock in the Soviet Union doubled. Millions of Soviet citizens were able to move out of communal apartments, into single-family apartments. However, such growth came at a cost to quality.

Many apartments constructed during this period were four- and five-story buildings cheaply built from prefabricated concrete panels. They were dubbed *Khrushchebi*, a contraction of Khrushchev and the Russian word for slum, *truscheba*. These seemingly endless, box-like buildings offered up depressing two-room apartments with 50-square-foot kitchens.

The apartments were typically built on city outskirts. In Moscow, whole villages and areas of farmland were ploughed under to make room for the new housing blocks. Between 1956 and 1965, more than 100,000,000 Soviets moved in.

Voices from the West

When the Cold War began heating up, the United States and Britain worked hard to counter and compete with Soviet propaganda and achievements. The BBC started beaming radio signals into the Soviet Union in 1946. The Voice of America network followed suit the next year.

Despite Soviet efforts to jam the signals, Soviet citizens found ways to listen. What they heard captivated them. Western entertainment and lifestyles—as presented through the foreign programming—proved intoxicating.

A decade later, the Soviets made more proactive efforts of their own by hosting the 1957 International Youth Festival in Moscow. For more than a week, tens of thousands of young foreigners attended the festival and interacted with Soviet youth. However, in the party's attempt to showcase Moscow for the world, it had inadvertently enticed a large group of its younger generation to sample Western culture.

The trend continued the next year when the Soviet Union and the United States signed a cultural agreement to foster better relations. The pact called for cultural and scholarly exchanges between artists, scientists, scholars, and athletes. American films now became common features in Russian cinemas. American fashion, especially blue jeans, became desired. American music—above all, jazz and rock and roll—stoked the passions of Soviet youth.

The Space Race and Religion

While the Soviets trailed the United States in terms of living standards and consumption levels, the Soviets for a time bested the United States in the race to space. Just months after the International Youth Festival, the Soviets launched the unmanned satellite *Sputnik* on October 4, 1957. A month later, *Sputnik II* launched into orbit with the dog Laika on board. In April of 1961, the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space.

Gagarin's experience revived public discussions about God, religion, and science. He described the heavens as a space devoid of God. Consequently, the Soviets' longstanding antireligious rhetoric seemed confirmed. The journal *Science and Religion* theorized that since Gagarin encountered expansive space—but no signs of God—science argued against God's existence.

This coincided with Nikita Khrushchev's recently revived anti-religious campaign. In 1959, the Soviet premier sought to limit the expressions of religiosity that had reemerged in the Soviet Union after Stalin allowed churches to reopen during World War II. Khrushchev directed that as many as 10,000 churches close their doors for good. Articles in the Soviet press pilloried Russian Orthodox priests, attacking them as drunks and debauched frauds.

Soviet Education

Soviet success in space seemed to confirm the wisdom of a post-Stalin emphasis on education, as the regime had established magnet schools in mathematics, science, and foreign languages for academically gifted children across the USSR. Initially, Khrushchev revived the idea of vocational education. After Khrushchev fell from power, the government revised the educational norms yet again. From the mid-1960s onward, the Soviet education system reverted to a 10-year model.

Soviet students attended school from Monday through Saturday from September until June. For all of the struggles that the Soviets faced in other areas of life, the Soviet education system achieved near-universal literacy by 1960, according to UNESCO. This was an extraordinary achievement in a nation populated by more than 100 nationalities, where some 130 languages were spoken.

On the other hand, the Soviet system stressed rote memorization—and the party line—at the expense of critical thinking. Even during the post-Stalin cultural thaw, historical studies continued to be framed in Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Queues and *Blat*

If there was one thing that defined everyday life for ordinary Soviets, it was the queue. People stood in line for just about everything in the Soviet Union. In communal apartments, they queued up for the toilet or the washroom. On the street, lines inevitably formed outside shops. During the Stalinist and Khrushchev eras, people cued for staples like butter, sugar, bread, and

sausages. By the 1970s, when life's basics were in more ample supply, the wait was for American jeans and other Western imports.

It's estimated that Soviet citizens spent as much as one-third of their non-working hours in a line. The vast majority of those in line were women. Beyond lines, there were connections. Gaining access to scarce products—like original imported Beatles records—required connections, or alliances, which the Soviets called *blat*. Blat—and the access rendered by it—also became an important form of social capital.

A second economy—the black market—also flourished in the Soviet Union. This consisted of goods smuggled from abroad, as well as goods and services produced by Soviet citizens. Managers and workers skimmed incoming shipments to sell or exchange for other goods and favors.



Soviet Women

Natalia Baranskaya captures the particular burdens carried by Soviet women in her novella *A Week Like Any Other*, published in 1969. The heroine Olga Nikolaevna tells the story in diary fashion. She is a lab technician who lives more than an hour from work, with her husband and two children.

Baranskaya describes a relatively new reality in the lives of urban Soviet women. While in times past, Soviet women relied on their own mothers to care for their children when they worked, a growing number of urban women didn't have an older woman on whom to rely.

Baranskaya conveys the long workday, an arduous commute, substandard daycare, and the ever-present need to queue up. When the fictional husband in Baranskaya's tale has no choice but to help out, he bitterly complains to Olga.

Baranskaya's tale pointed out the fact that fundamental gender inequality persisted in Soviet society, despite official claims to the contrary. Women may have had unparalleled professional opportunities in the Soviet Union, but their pay always lagged behind men's. In addition, women didn't share the same access to political power.



SUGGESTED READINGS

Hanson, "The Brezhnev Era."

Slezkine, *The House of Government*.

Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*.

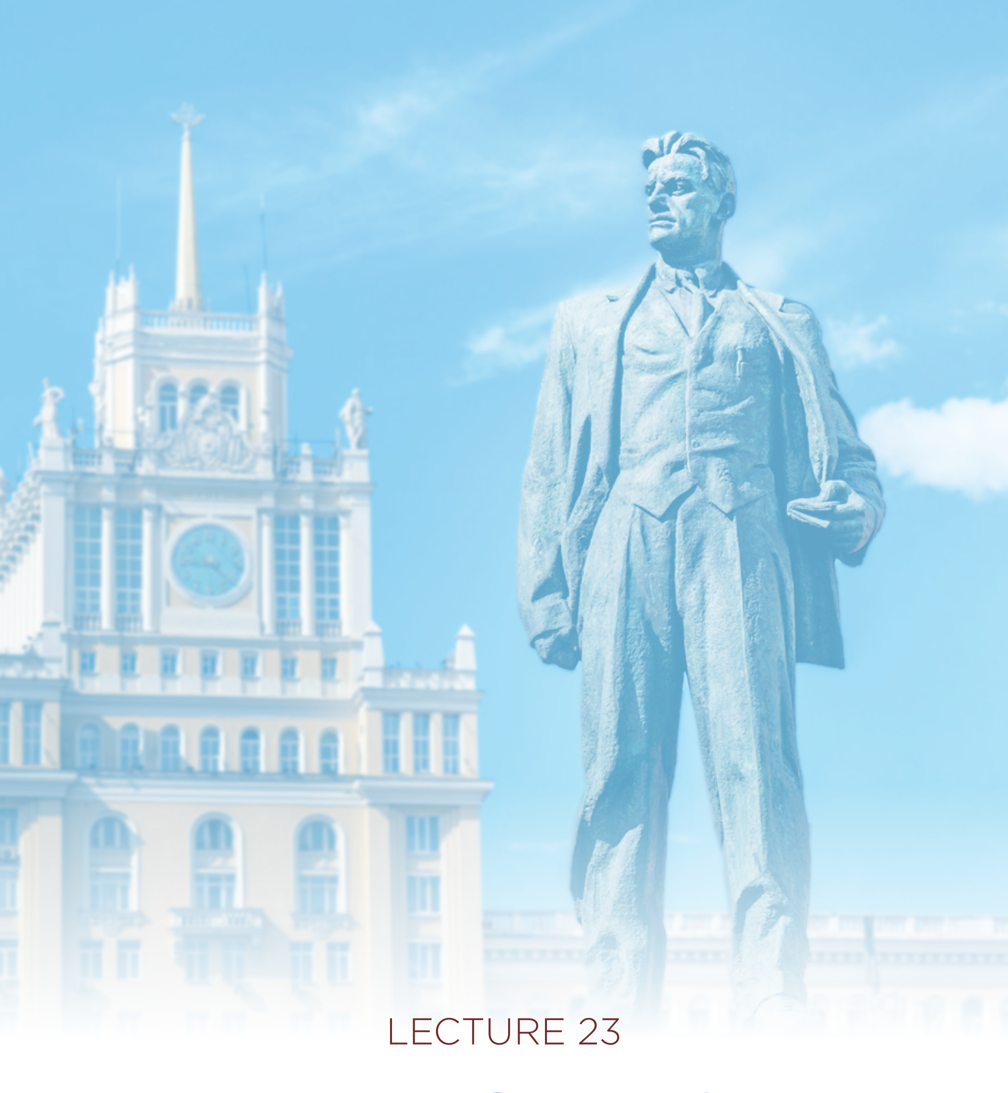
Von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did the experience of communal apartments affect Soviet culture? How did it affect political culture?

2. How did the government policy of peaceful coexistence with the United States ultimately affect Soviet culture? Was this effect intentional?

3. How influential was the space race and the Sputnik program to Soviet identity and culture?



LECTURE 23

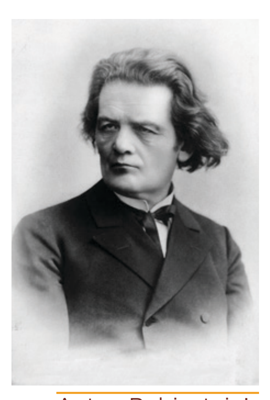
INTELLIGENTSIA, DISSIDENTS, AND SAMIZDAT

This lecture explores the culture of intellectual dissent in Russian history. Russian intellectuals and artists played a unique, important, role in a state that maintained autocratic control during the imperial period and in the Soviet Communist era that followed.

Nicholas I

Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855) used the government-controlled press to glorify the monarchy and give the illusion of widespread popular support. However, his reign also saw the development of writers such as Alexander Pushkin, who questioned inequality, injustice, and arbitrary rule.

In the aftermath of the European revolutions of 1848, Nicholas I began a concerted effort to "kill off the intellectual ferment of the 'remarkable decade,'" according to Russian scholar James H. Billington. To do so, Nicholas employed a variety of tactics: limiting the number of students enrolled in Russia's six universities and banning the study of philosophy for young Russians. He even confiscated the pianist Anton Rubinstein's compositions after Rubinstein returned from Europe in 1848, for fear that his musical works might contain a secret revolutionary code.



Anton Rubinstein's

In 1849, Nicholas I ordered the arrest of 52 members of the Petrashevsky Circle—a group of progressive intellectuals in St. Petersburg. (Mikhail Petrashevsky himself was a follower of the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier.)

The group was interested in theories of social renovation. Although this was essentially a literary discussion group rather than a political organization, Nicholas sentenced 21 of the arrested members to death. The novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky—author of *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*—was among them. As members of the group prepared for their executions, the tsar commuted the death sentences to terms in prison and exile. Dostoevsky never forgot the terror he experienced, which was precisely Nicholas's intent.

The Bolsheviks

The Russian revolutionaries, socialists, and terrorists of the late 19th century would take inspiration from earlier intellectuals. In doing so, they promoted the continuing belief in Russian society of the transformative potential of words, ideas, and intellectual culture.

During the early 20th century, the radical Bolsheviks subscribed to this conviction and acted upon it. However, the new Soviet government sought to silence intellectuals who espoused views that different from official Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Over the course of several months in 1922 and 1923, the Soviet government forcibly deported nearly 100 intellectuals and their families to Western Europe. Included among this group were philosophers and agronomists, professors, poets, and journalists.

Soviet authorities now enlisted artists, intellectuals, and writers to advance the Communist Party agenda rather than to allow independent creativity. All publishing was centralized under the state publisher, Gosizdat. Writers and artists were organized into unions whose executive bodies enforced appropriate cultural work through a system of rewards and reprimands.

Art under Khrushchev

Soviet control over the arts and intellectual work reached an apex under Joseph Stalin. It eased under Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev. During a subsequent period of de-Stalinization and cultural thaw, the nation's poetry, literature, and films came to express individual feelings and the private complexities of Soviet life more vigorously than had been seen for decades.



Publishing some works still wasn't easy, though. In 1960, the Russian Jewish journalist and fiction writer Vasily Grossman wrote the novel *Life and Fate*, which some have called the greatest World War II novel ever written.

The work conveys the tragedies of the war and critiques the regimes that waged it.

In 1961, when Grossman submitted the book for publication, he was told that it was un-publishable for the next 250 years. The KGB confiscated the manuscript and all of Grossman's drafts. They even took the ribbons from his typewriter to ensure that he couldn't recreate it. Grossman died in 1964. The book didn't come out until 1980 in the West and 1988 in the Soviet Union.

SAMIZDAT

Some writers and intellectuals under the Soviet regime circumvented the authorities through self-publication, a practice known as *samizdat*. They would type out several carbon copies of their work and circulate them surreptitiously. People read a copy before passing the scarce samizdat treasure to a trusted friend. In this way, samizdat emerged as something of an intellectual oasis after decades of uninspired socialist realism.



Privacy and Crackdowns

For a time in the Soviet Union's communal apartments, intellectuals lacked the room for much creativity. However, the massive housing initiative undertaken by Khrushchev in the 1950s began to change this. Artists found space to write novels and compose poetry. Family kitchens became hot spots of cultural productivity and exchange, known as "dissident kitchens."

After a time, young poets moved away from their kitchen tables and began to recite their lyrics in city squares. Some amassed loyal followings. In Moscow's Mayakovsky Square, the government had erected a statue to the early Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky in 1958. There, readings held even in the dead of winter could attract thousands of listeners.

However, by April 1961, the Khrushchev regime tired of these otherwise harmless poetry readings. The gatherings were banned and attendees were driven from the square by force. On several occasions, the authorities used snowplows to enforce the point.

A month after the authorities clamped down, new laws were passed against "parasitism" or avoiding "socially useful" work. The laws were used to arrest poets around the country.

The Visual Arts

Dissidents also emerged through non-conformist art. In 1962, the Moscow section of the Artists' Union sponsored an exhibit to celebrate the group's 30th anniversary. In addition to traditional works by conservative artists, the exhibit also included abstract pieces by younger artists such as Ely Bielutin, Vladimir Yankilevsky, and Ernst Neizvestny.

Nikita Khrushchev, as he toured the display, criticized some of the abstract works. He profanely derided much of what he saw, including Ernst Neizvestny's sculpture. He and the artist engaged in a heated argument. In the fallout, Neizvestny was unable to show his work publicly for several years. However, after Khrushchev died in 1971, the late premier's family asked the sculptor to design his grave memorial.

In September 1974, a new exhibit of non-conformist art appeared in an urban forest on the outskirts of Moscow. The Soviet artists who organized their exhibit invited as many foreign journalists as they could to attend. They expected the authorities to respond unfavorably. They were correct.

State security police used bulldozers and water cannons to disperse artists and onlookers and to destroy the art. Foreign journalists witnessed the proceedings. International protests raised the profile of the artists involved in what came to be known as the Bulldozer Exhibition.

Andrei Sakharov

One of Russia's greatest minds was the nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov (1921–1989). He worked on the Soviets' early nuclear programs and was a key member of the team that developed the nation's first hydrogen bomb. In the late 1960s, he began to campaign for civil rights and peaceful coexistence with the United States.

Sakharov lost his privileged position in the Soviet scientific community as a result. However, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975, and was described by the Nobel committee as "a spokesperson for mankind." In 1980, Sakharov was sentenced to a life of exile in the closed city of Gorky, which today is known as Nizhny Novgorod. It is 260 miles east of Moscow.



His wife, Yelena Bonner, who also advocated for human rights, was exiled with her husband in 1984 after being convicted of anti-Soviet activity. Sakharov succeeded at winning the release of his wife and himself after going on a six-month hunger strike in 1985.

He became a leader of the democratic opposition and, in 1989, was a member of a commission that was responsible for drafting a new constitution. He died in December of 1989.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*.

Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

———, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How much consistency was there between the Russian intelligentsia during the tsarist period and Soviet dissidents?
2. What gave rise to the phenomenon of samizdat? How influential was it?
3. Was all culture political in the late Soviet period?



LECTURE 24

SOVIET CHAOS AND RUSSIAN REVENGE

On December 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as general secretary of the Communist Party and as president of the Soviet Union. A half hour later, the red flag over the Kremlin—emblazoned with hammer and sickle—was lowered. The Soviet Union was no more. This lecture looks at events before, during, and after Gorbachev's eventful reign.

Background on Gorbachev and Brezhnev

Gorbachev was a devout Communist believer. He had wanted to reform Communism in order to save it. He unintentionally dismantled the Soviet Union in the process.



In many ways, Gorbachev's idealism was sandwiched between the authoritarian tendencies that both preceded and followed him: the neo-Stalinism of his most significant contemporary predecessor, Leonid Brezhnev, and the neo-tsarist era of his most significant successor, Vladimir Putin.

Brezhnev pushed his one-time patron, Nikita Khrushchev, from power in a 1964 coup. The Brezhnev years in the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982 are usually described as a period of stagnation, but it was one of the most stable eras in USSR history.



The problem was that Soviet citizens' expectations had grown. Khrushchev had vowed that the Soviet Union would overtake the United States economically by 1970, yet Brezhnev inherited a declining economy. Corruption and patronage benefited some actors in the state economy at the expense of others. The black market flourished like never before.

In 1979, the Soviets launched an invasion of Afghanistan, where they intervened to prop up a leftist regime. This dragged on for a decade, at a cost of 15,000 Soviet lives and a tremendous amount of money. Brezhnev never saw fit to disengage, even as the economic growth rate fell to zero.

Aging Leaders

The Soviet system had moved away from the Bolsheviks' utopian visions of the 1920s. Then, the leadership started to die. Unlike at other times in Soviet history, these deaths weren't nefarious. Instead, Soviet leaders were dying from old age.

In the early 1980s, the deaths of high-ranking Soviet or Communist Party officials became commonplace, including the 75-year-old Brezhnev himself. Instead of replacing the late Brezhnev with someone from a younger generation, the Politburo committee named the 70-year-old Yuri Andropov as the new general secretary. He died 14 months later, in February 1984. Next up was the 74-year-old Konstantin Chernenko, who lasted barely a year before expiring in March of 1985.



It was after Chernenko's death that the party leadership named the 52-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev as the next general secretary of the Communist Party and leader of the country. Now, Gorbachev initiated a platform of reform.

Gorbachev's Reform Attempts

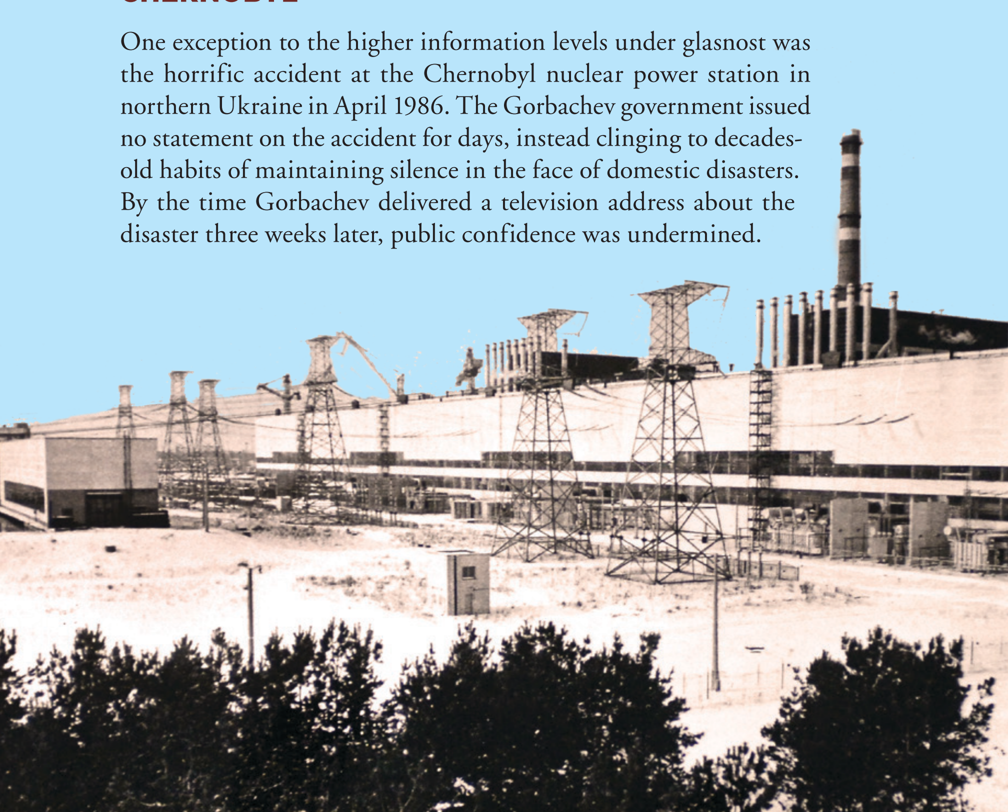
Unfortunately for Gorbachev, the high global oil prices of the 1970s, which had allowed for a measure of economic stability in the Soviet Union, had since gone bust. Furthermore, the USSR faced a stagnant economy, the ruinous war in Afghanistan, and a surge of military spending by the United States under its anti-Communist president, Ronald Reagan.

Gorbachev initiated a restructuring of the Soviets' centrally planned economy. Known as *perestroika*, it called for a more flexible system of economic management and opportunities for enterprises to become self-financing. However, for the new plan to succeed, Gorbachev believed that Soviet citizens also needed to be more informed.

To that end, he initiated his policy of *glasnost*. Glasnost removed the rigid limitations of state censorship and allowed for unprecedented levels of freedom of expression. Gorbachev hoped that glasnost would rejuvenate the Soviet people. Instead, it exposed systemic social and political problems. These irrevocably tarnished many of the legitimizing myths of the Soviet system. On the television nightly news, Soviets began to see social upheavals once hidden from sight.

CHERNOBYL

One exception to the higher information levels under glasnost was the horrific accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in northern Ukraine in April 1986. The Gorbachev government issued no statement on the accident for days, instead clinging to decades-old habits of maintaining silence in the face of domestic disasters. By the time Gorbachev delivered a television address about the disaster three weeks later, public confidence was undermined.



Foreign Policy and Yeltsin

In a 1988 speech before the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, Gorbachev renounced the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine. Under the Brezhnev Doctrine, the Soviet Union had reserved the right to intervene in any state where socialism was in jeopardy. He also announced that the USSR would reduce its forces in Eastern Europe by 500,000 over the next two years. This proved decisive.

Without Moscow's military support, the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe fell in quick succession. In the Soviet Union, protestors filled Red Square with jeers and boos, as Gorbachev and his fellow leaders stood by glumly.

Meanwhile, Gorbachev had also created a new legislature—called the Congress of People's Deputies—that had introduced contested elections and a new crop of politicians on the national stage. These included the former de facto mayor of Moscow, Boris Yeltsin. He was elected to the Congress of People's Deputies in March 1989 and now led a radical reform faction.



Gorbachev's position worsened after he supported an initiative to end the Communist Party's monopoly on power in February 1990. This was an attempt to gain control of the reforming tide that was surging past him. A month later, he was elected to the newly created position of president of the Soviet Union and appeared to have weathered the storm, but appearances were deceiving.

The Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuanian, and Estonia soon asserted their national sovereignty; a threat more severe and immediate than the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc had been. Boris Yeltsin used nationalist sentiment to stake a claim to authority apart from Gorbachev. His populist rhetoric gave the Soviets an alternative in which to believe.

End of the USSR

As additional republics began to pull away from Moscow's control, Gorbachev tried to salvage the union by accommodating popular sentiment. He increasingly liberalized his policies to stave off threats both from hardline Communists and nationalists like Yeltsin. However, in May 1990, Yeltsin was elected president of the Russian Republic, the state's largest political entity.

Yeltsin championed the primacy of the Russian Republic over the authority of the Soviet Union. Once he did, other republics followed suit. Gorbachev was under pressure from other factions as well. Communist hardliners placed him under house arrest in August 1991 and transferred power to the vice president. The plotters had failed to arrest Yeltsin.

As news spread that Gorbachev was being held, Yeltsin made his way to the building that housed the Russian Parliament to organize a popular defense against the coup. Within three days, the counter-revolution was over.

In the immediate aftermath, the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies was disbanded, as was the Communist Party. Individual Soviet republics declared their independence from the USSR, one after the other. There was no longer any Soviet Union left for Gorbachev to lead. On December 25, 1991, he resigned. The era of the USSR had come to an end.

After the USSR

The transition from Communism and the culture of a one-party state to capitalism and democracy would be difficult. Communist apparatchiks didn't suddenly become liberal democrats. They had a vested interest in maintaining their prerogatives of power and influence. When the Soviet state fell, many former elites became the new oligarchs.

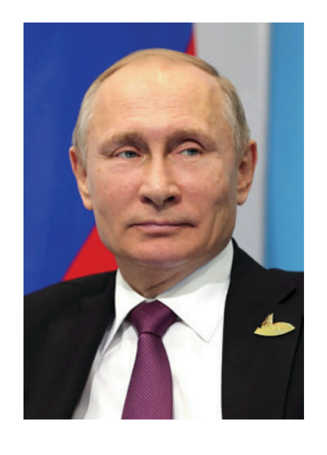
More troubles lay ahead. Boris Yeltsin's demeanor as a man of the people soon seemed a charade. His virtue receded as he fell prey to cronyism, corruption, and his own thirst for power. Once a defender of Russian democracy, Yeltsin directed tanks to fire on the Russian Parliament two years later.

In doing so, he set the stage for a new round of authoritarian rule. Russian parliamentarians drafted constitutional amendments that would limit Yeltsin's power, but he used force to maintain control. Additionally, although Yeltsin embraced economic reforms as a sort of shock therapy to transition to a market economy, these led to horrible inflation.

Vladimir Putin

Yeltsin's health deteriorated as the decade wore one. His approval ratings fell to less than 10 percent. Still—with the rampant corruption he oversaw—those in ruling circles had an incentive to make sure that the next Russian president wouldn't throw the lot of them in jail.

In the late summer of 1999, those in power plucked from obscurity a former KGB official, Vladimir Putin, who appears to have been the choice of several oligarchs closely connected to Yeltsin. A few months later, Yeltsin himself resigned in a surprising New Year's Eve address to the nation. Putin became president.



In turn, Putin used separatist violence that rattled the Caucasus as an excuse to increase a broader regional tendency towards authoritarian rule. For instance, a series of apartment bombings in 1999—when he was still Yeltsin's prime minister—allowed Putin to employ strong-arm tactics and renew the bombing of the Chechen capital of Grozny. After becoming president, he took an increasingly tough stance on the war in Chechnya. His demeanor as a tough, no-nonsense ruler appealed to the population.

Meanwhile, as the economy recovered from its 1998 nadir, Putin's popularity grew. In the years to come, he would engineer a level of popularity rivaling the personality cult of Joseph Stalin. He did so by presenting himself as the personification of Russian strength and power.

More broadly, concepts of Russian nationality reemerged on levels not seen since the reigns of the tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These coalesced in Russia's 21st-century annexation of Crimea and its meddling in Ukraine. Putin has gone so far as to revive the idea of a Russian nation that is not coterminous with existing political borders—that is, he seems to believe that Russia and its leaders have a blank check on which to draw to defend the interests of Russians, even beyond its territorial borders.

Putin also propelled a revival of the Russian Orthodox Church and an appreciation for Russia's historical past extending beyond the Bolshevik revolution. These cultural currents facilitated the rebuilding of great historical structures like the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow and an appreciation for great literary figures, including Alexander Pushkin and Leo Tolstoy.



However, Putin also inspired the persecution of groups who didn't conform to state-prescribed ideals. The political and cultural renaissance of Russia under Putin also led to renewed popular fondness for larger-than-life leaders like Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Stalin.

The Romanov tsars may have been dead and buried, and the Soviet Union was gone for good. Yet the beliefs rooted in Russia's long history and culture endured.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Brown, "The Gorbachev Era."

Gessen, *The Man without a Face*.

Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*.

McFaul, "The Russian Federation."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should we be more surprised that the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 or that it lasted as long as it did?
2. Does the Soviet collapse prove that the tsars and communists were right to fear intellectual critical energy?
3. To what extent has Putin embraced Russian history and culture to legitimize his authority and agenda?

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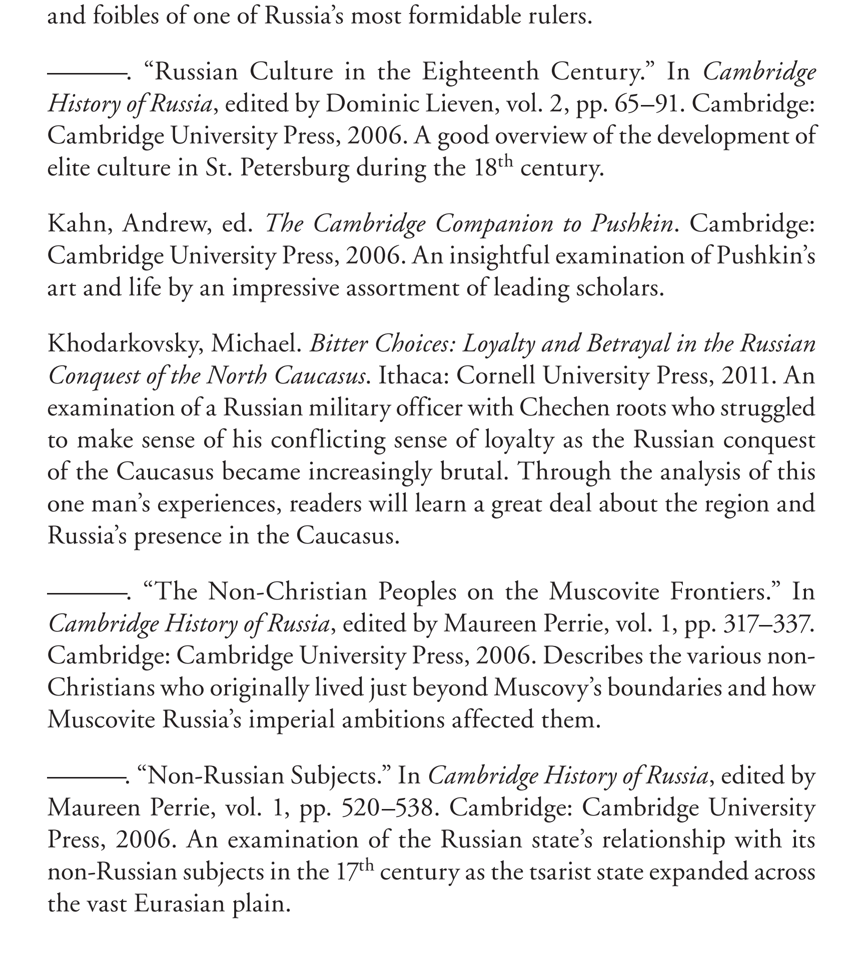
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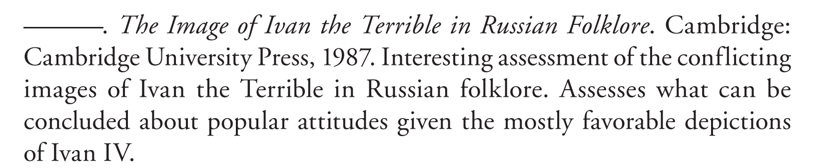
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